



MARK BURNS

SEPTEMBER 1985

"ANYTHING FOR A LAUGH" 1985
EARTHENWARE WITH POLYCHROME SURFACES
21"H x 19"W x 14"D



NANCY CARMAN

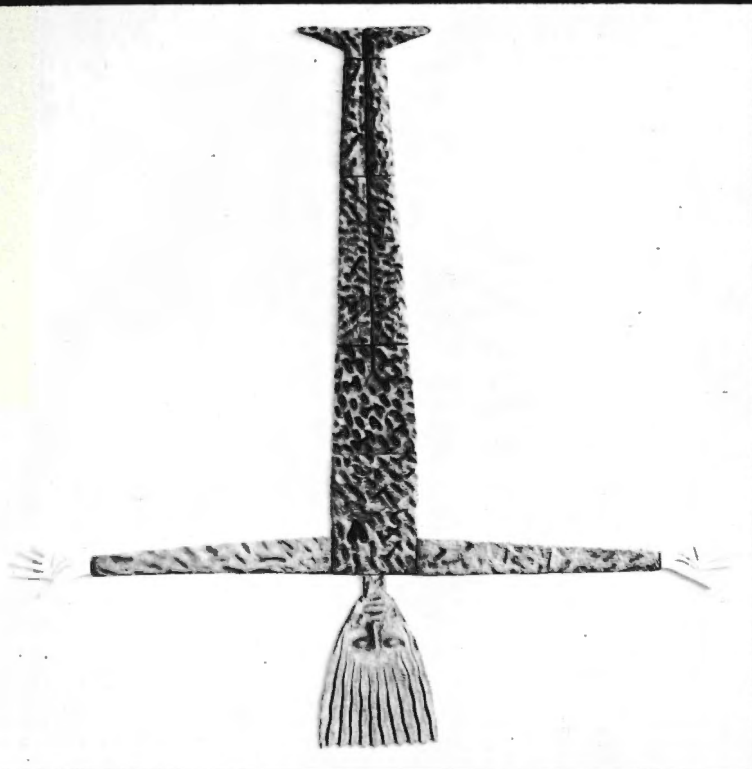
OCTOBER, 1985



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"Colorado Sun Vessel,"
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earthenware

Photo: Bruce S. Rose

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Raku
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A Study in Bright XV, 1985,
26" × 28", raku wall piece

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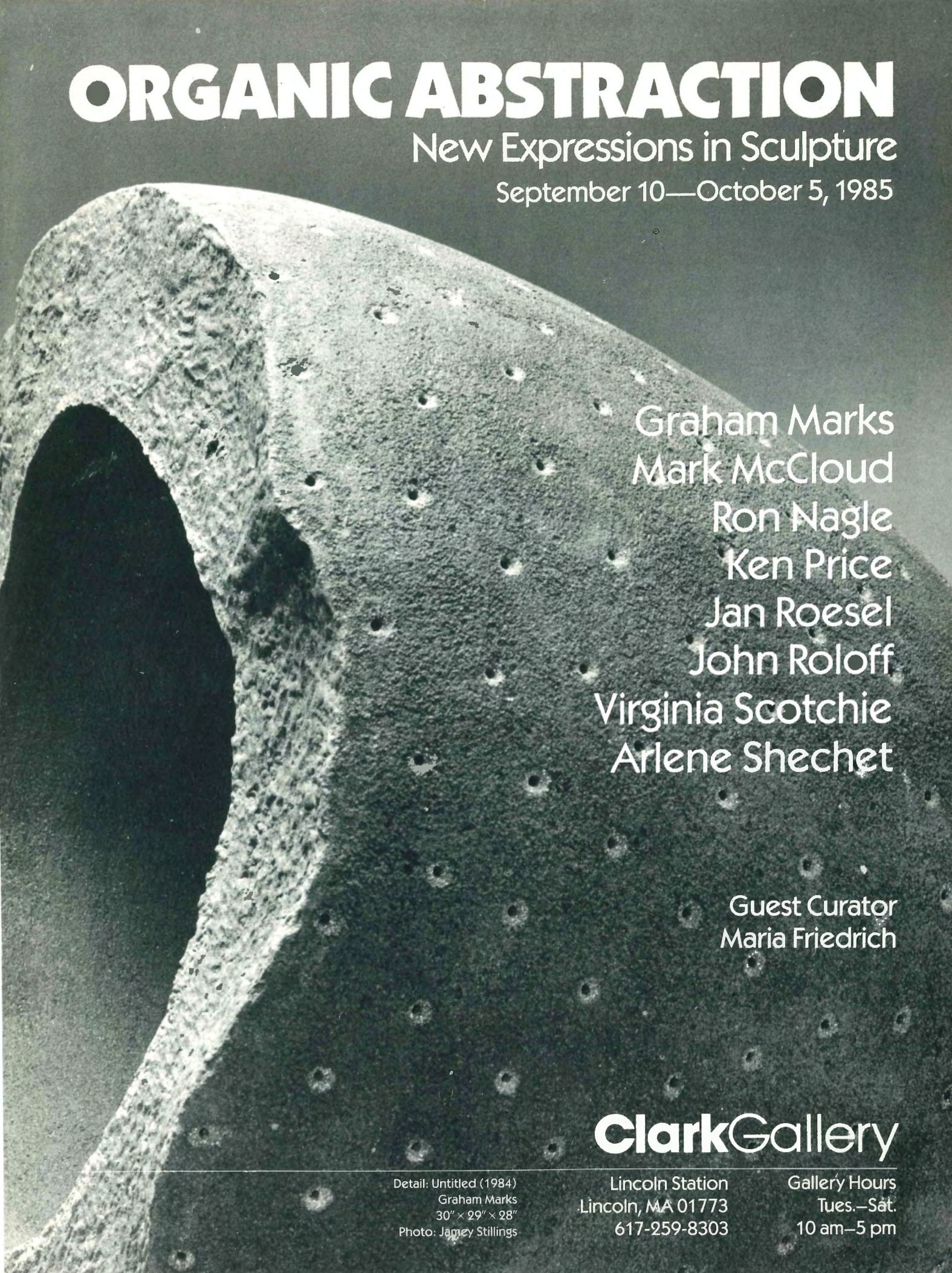
Santa Fe, NM 87501

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ORGANIC ABSTRACTION

New Expressions in Sculpture

September 10—October 5, 1985



Graham Marks
Mark McCloud
Ron Nagle
Ken Price
Jan Roesel
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Arlene Shechet

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Detail: Untitled (1984)
Graham Marks
30" x 29" x 28"
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Peter VandenBerge
Peter Voulkos
William Wyman



Maria Friedrich

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The French Curve (1984)
Arthur González
30" x 28" x 18"

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Volume 4, Number 2

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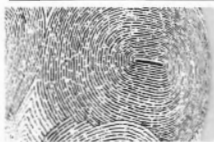
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(Cover) *Eva* by Robert Brady (1984), 52" (132 cm) high. Collection Daniel Jacobs, New York. Photo: Brad Guice.

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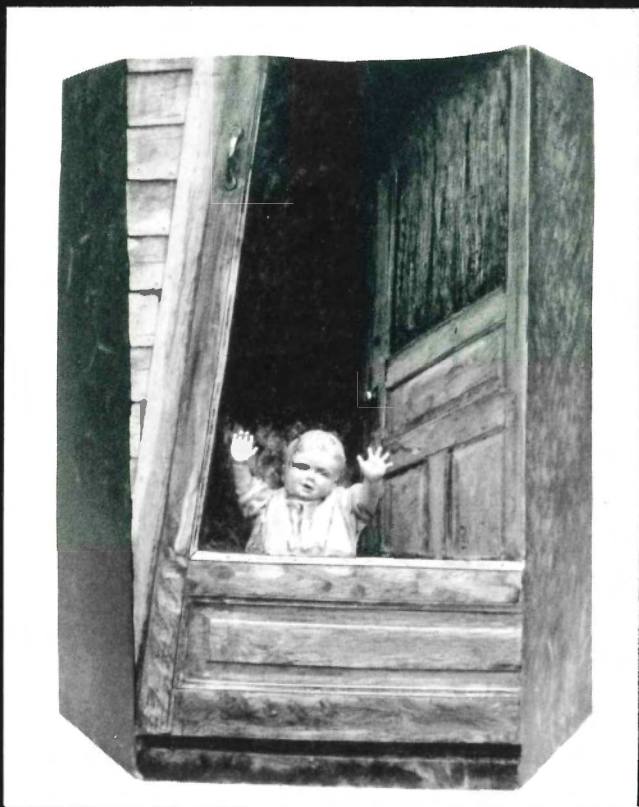
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Robert Shay

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Jack

EARL



New Book

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*Untitled, 1985,
12" x 8½" x 10¼," porcelain*



Photo by: George Flemming

ANNE SMITH

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September 14 to October 16



Photo: Dean Powell

CUP AND SAUCER, 1985. Porcelain, 4 x 4 inches. Coll: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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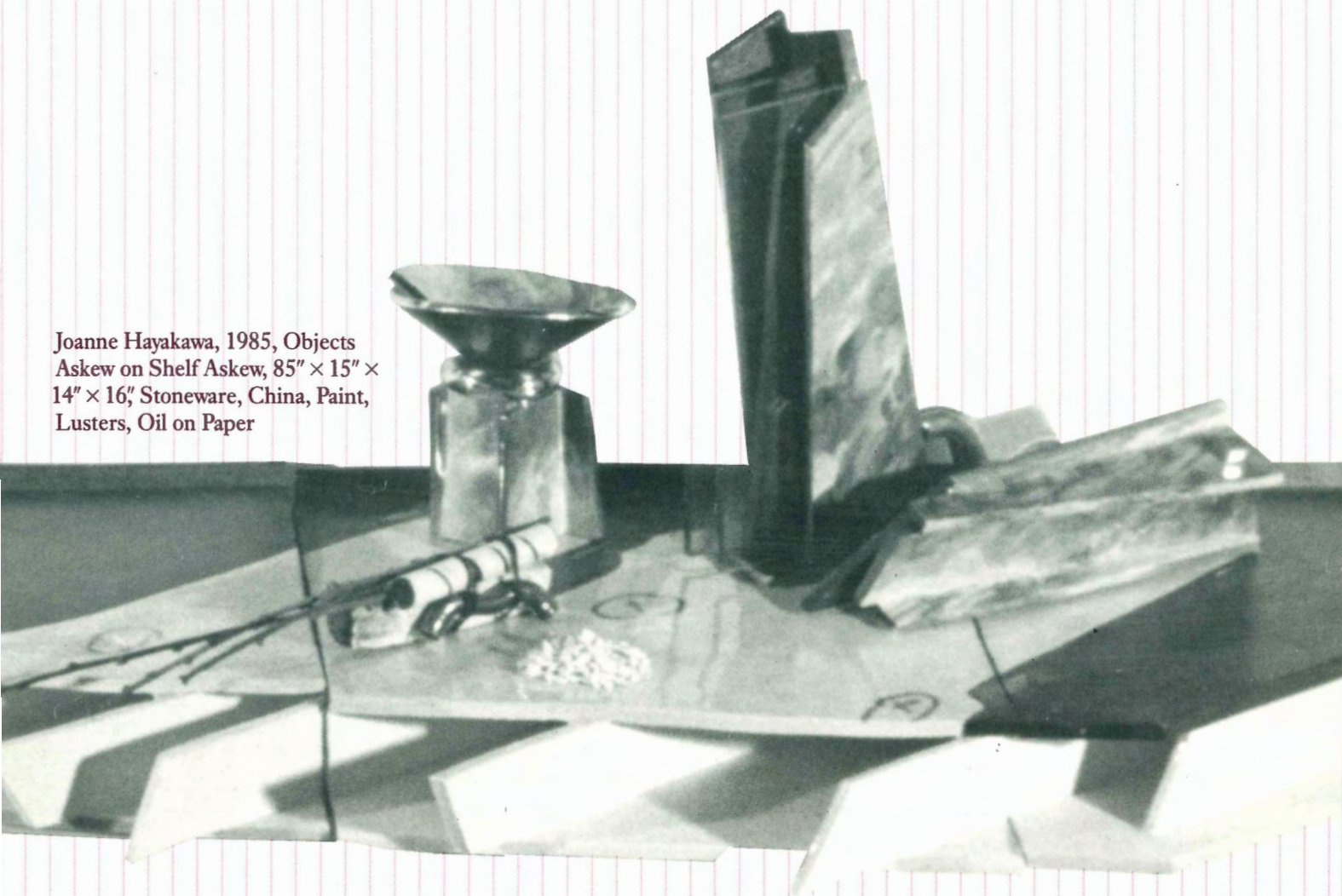
October 18–November 19
"Ceramic Sculpture"

Christine Federighi
Indira Freitas Johnson

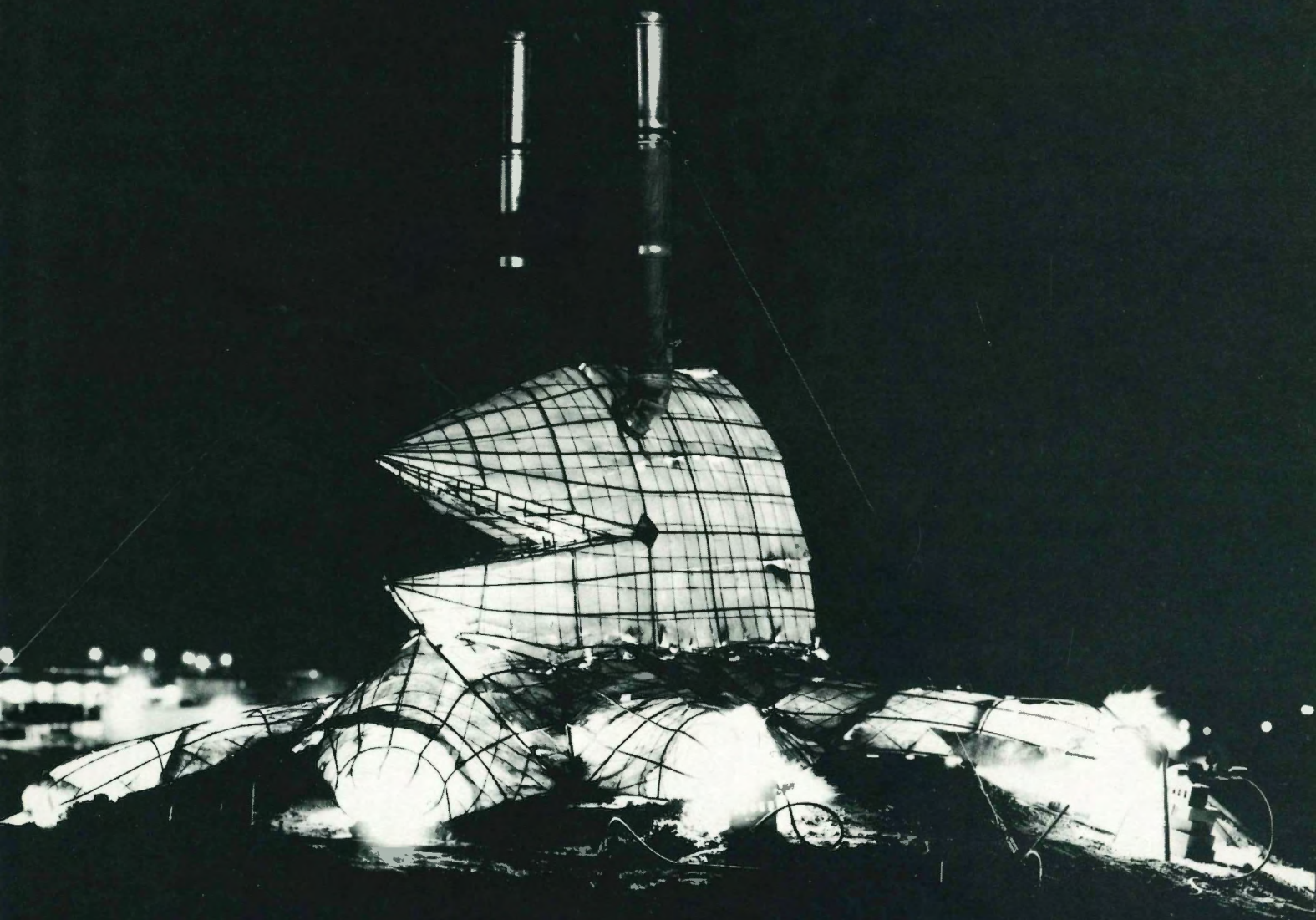
November 22–January 4
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Philip Cornelius

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Joanne Hayakawa, 1985, Objects
Askew on Shelf Askew, 85" × 15" ×
14" × 16", Stoneware, China, Paint,
Lusters, Oil on Paper



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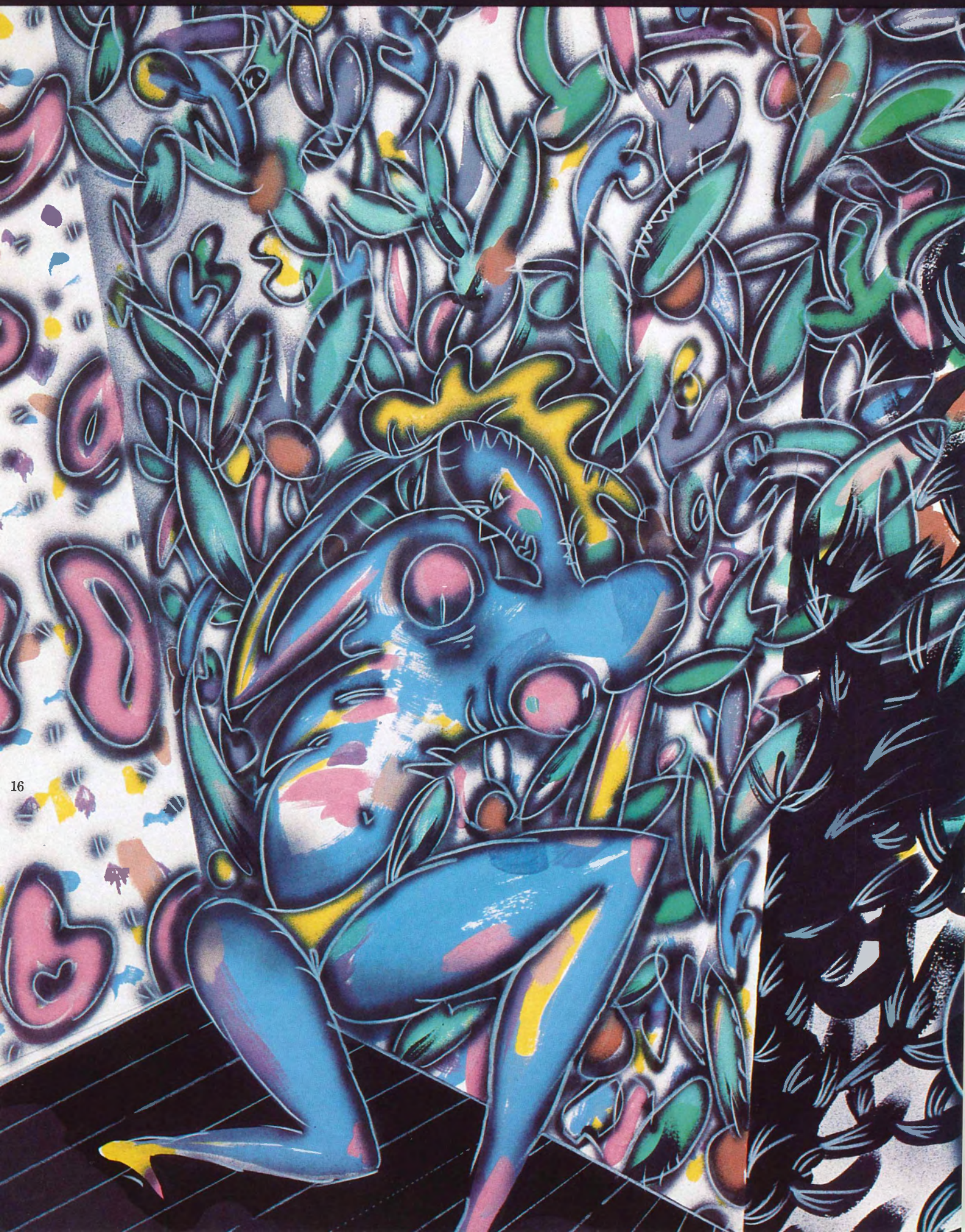
JOHN ROLOFF

**Night Firing of Black Coral Starfish Element
For
"Ancient Shoreline/Island for Lake Lahontan"
University of Nevada-Reno 1985**

John Roloff is represented by:
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Photo by Elke Morris





commemorates the time, as a young boy, he tried to make his go-cart stop with his bare feet. His foot got extremely bloodied, so in the piece he layed a clay foot on top of the go-cart and gilded it with gold.

Other works from this time were about the same size, including totemic figures that foreshadowed later, life-size figures. Making a livelihood was more difficult. The practical answer was to be a production potter, and Brady was quite thorough about it for as short-lived as it was. He enlisted two students from Antioch College in Ohio to work as his apprentices. The situation was a good one, but after they left to return to school, Brady left, too. Only six months had passed. His one studio sale was enough to convince him that his efforts were unrewarding. Not because he was a poor salesman—on the contrary, he was a good one. Brady has the “gift of gab” and a swelling self-confidence in his work. It is easy to be affected by it. But he didn’t like hearing people say his prices were too high—too high for something he had given every consideration to!—and there simply was no respect for the occupation. He suffered disillusionment common to potters and fell into a three-month depression before returning to other means of survival: painting houses and driving an oil truck.

Several restless months passed. During this time, Brady remembers a day he was painting a church basement when he came upon a stack of old art magazines. Entranced, he spent the rest of the afternoon paging through them and building objects in his head. His passion for art revived, Brady decided to go to graduate school. He applied to the University of California at Davis due to the acclaim of its art faculty—Roy DeForest, William Wiley, Wayne Thiebaud, Manuel Neri, and, of course, Robert Arneson—and its impressive roster of ceramic grads—Deborah Butterfield, David Gilhooly, Richard Notkin, Richard Shaw, Chris Unterseher, and Peter VandenBerge among them.

Graduate school was a serious time for Brady, and he put in long hours in the fabled ceramic studio known as “TB 9” (so called because it was only intended as a temporary building). Its inside walls were covered with ceramic memorabilia, curled and coated with white dust from as far back as Arneson’s first days, twenty years ago or more. Brady’s graduate show consisted of coiled grid pieces you could stack and unstack, roof eaves raku fired in sawdust, and other combinations of wire and clay.

The fall after graduation, Brady was hired as the third ceramic faculty member at Sacramento State University, where he currently teaches with Ruth Rippon and VandenBerge. Throughout his career, Brady has had to reckon with an audience that could not accept or follow the “irregular” path of his work. In his heart he was really an object maker, not a potter, although for a time he stayed with the vessel. He made pots five and six feet tall and covered them with patterns of themselves. People responded. Patrick Lannon, the well-known collector from Palm Beach, bought out Brady’s first show in 1976. Lannon’s lady friend, fashion designer Mary McFadden, also purchased two big vessels for her garment showroom. They were later pictured in *Vogue* and other leading fashion magazines as apartment décor. All of this fanfare spurred his career and encouraged those who doubted... particularly his gallery.

In 1980, Brady took a two-year leave of absence and went to Tennessee to be part of something *IMPORTANT* (so Susan Peterson said it was)—a new school built solely and exclusively for the preservation and promotion of American craft. Peterson was charged with hiring the five main faculty members and five subordinates. It was and is called the Appalachian Center for Crafts—funny name for a school that was destined to be progressive. Nonetheless, its faculty made it so by representing all regions of the country and a wide range of artistic viewpoints. That first year was everything anyone could hope to be a part of, and then some. Not too many people, but enough to make it interesting. There was comedy, drama, tragedy, and art. Brady learned a lot. He was prolific there; the school offered everything for uninterrupted work—few students and a rural community. Leisure time consisted of volleyball, pingpong, fishing, or watching reruns of “M*A*S*H.” A far cry from the hipness of home. But the salt of the earth was there, in Smithville, Tennessee, and the experience was central to Brady’s life. (The only other time that he gives equal importance to is a six-month period he lived in Mexico while a student at CCAC.)

Brady loves country western music and his studio was filled with the volume of those aching sad songs, his voice harmonizing every word into the wee hours of the morning. It all came back to San Francisco in the fall of 1982, for a show at Braunstein Gallery. There were five large standing figures with portions painted in washes of

pastel house paint supported by large chunks of quarried limestone and two-by-fours. One was a praying figure, another was standing with a candle in front of his chest. Their heads were less articulated than the present heads and were more like inverted vessels. These vestiges of figures, including the two all-black kneeling figures, are linked with Brady’s fascination with archaeological remains. They are solidly there, but seem more like a shell of mortality, or witness of what once was. There were also two large, round, white and blue screaming heads—shrieking as though they had just gone mad. Last fall at the Braunstein Gallery was a show of Brady’s which birthed yet another dimension—the sinew of human spirit. Finally, it is evident that pain need not be a prerequisite to art. It is there, it is penetrating, and best of all, it is joyous. Basically, the building process is the same. The life-size figures are coiled and pinched, though now supported by clay stick structures rather than wood. Their heads have faces and they appear to be smiling. It is a resurrection.

There are animal-human figures... more strict in the discipline of line. Standing females with the hindquarters of a dog and the heads of a sly fox—the kind that would mischievously invite you in for tea?

Along one wall there were four female figures: *Israfil*, the angel who comes to announce the end of the world with her sweet music. And *Jib*, who pairs with her in space. *Jib*, the bar on a sailboat’s boom controlling horizontal directions. *Hestia*, the incredibly emotive, fragile, and elegant female figure sitting atop an inclined cube. Her face parleys unspeakable truth and solitude. *Gnosis*, the one who possesses knowledge of the spiritual, has two bumps for a bosom and a small delicate waist that spreads into a long flowering skirt. Her torqued legs come straight out from her skirt and turn in at the bottom. Her feet are limp, like useless appendages soon to drop off in the process of evolution. Her spirit has been carrying her.

The nine or so other pieces seem to come out of other worlds, but share a bit of the past. The pair who seem to be there strictly for laughs, *Ron* and *Hester*, are short, no-necks. Their bodies are twice as wide as they are long. Their stubby legs and expressions belie the fact that they’ve been in the pickle jar too long. They look fierce, but you know they can’t run. Brady’s humor and spontaneity shows in the lightheartedness of these pieces. *Ron* and *Hester* would look good on the top of a wedding cake, or back to back as park benches.

Brady was always devoted to his work, but in Tennessee he may have realized that art is not the only important thing. There is a matrix of people, events, and activities that preclude art. All of those things that are the synthesis of art. Things that are the everyday, not just the beginning or the end.

There is no doubt that Brady is among the most capable of his contemporaries. At thirty-eight, he has a long train of work behind him and he looks forward to the future. It sometimes scares him that his past studio frenzies are fading, that he is losing his youthful passion. But perhaps the passion is giving way to a more mature activity. The real sincerity is stick-to-it-tive-ness—a slow-cook process resulting in vital, meaningful stuff.

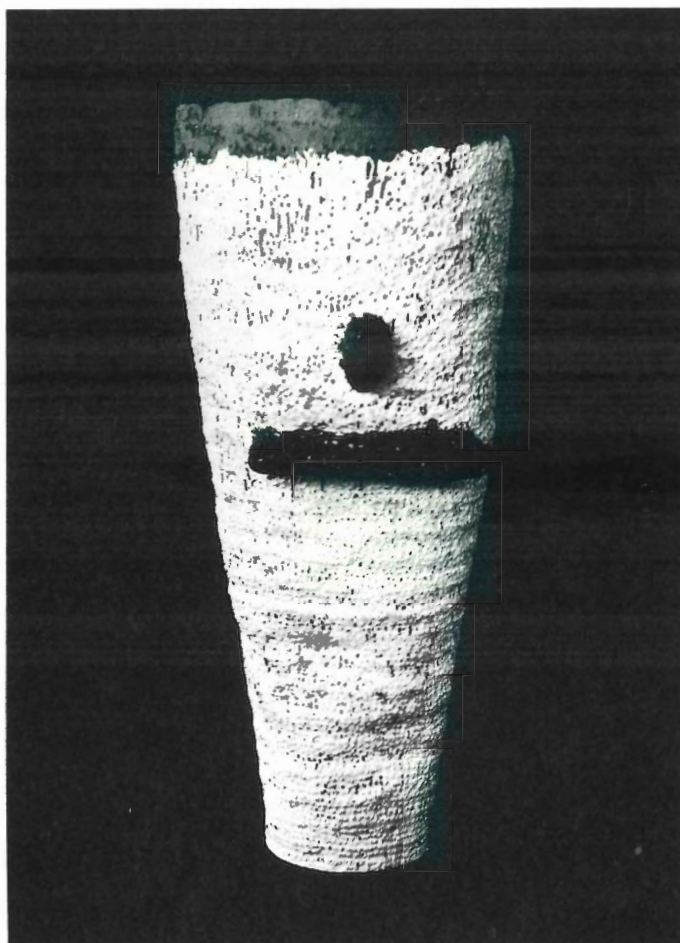
Here in Cala-free-way, I thank you for sharing it with me, brother.

Robert Brady is represented by Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco, and will be featured this fall at Frumkin & Struve Gallery, Chicago.

Gnosis Nos is a hobbyist: a dabbler in ceramics, a dabbler in creative writing, a dreamer and non-achiever, but steadfastly a lover of art.

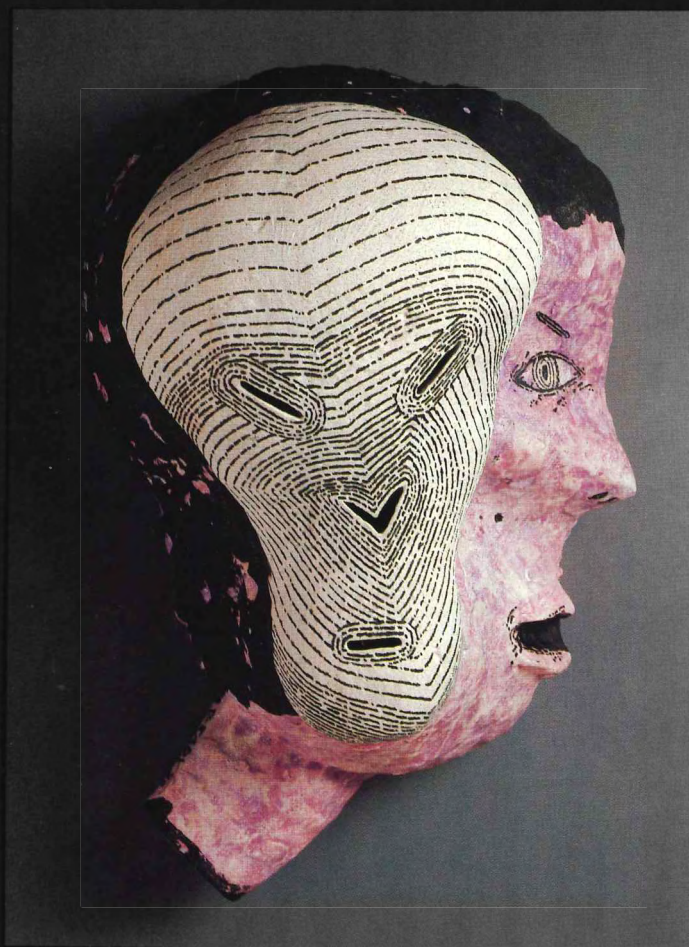
(Pages 16–17) Dick (1984), 30" × 40" (75 × 100 cm), acrylic on paper. Courtesy Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco.

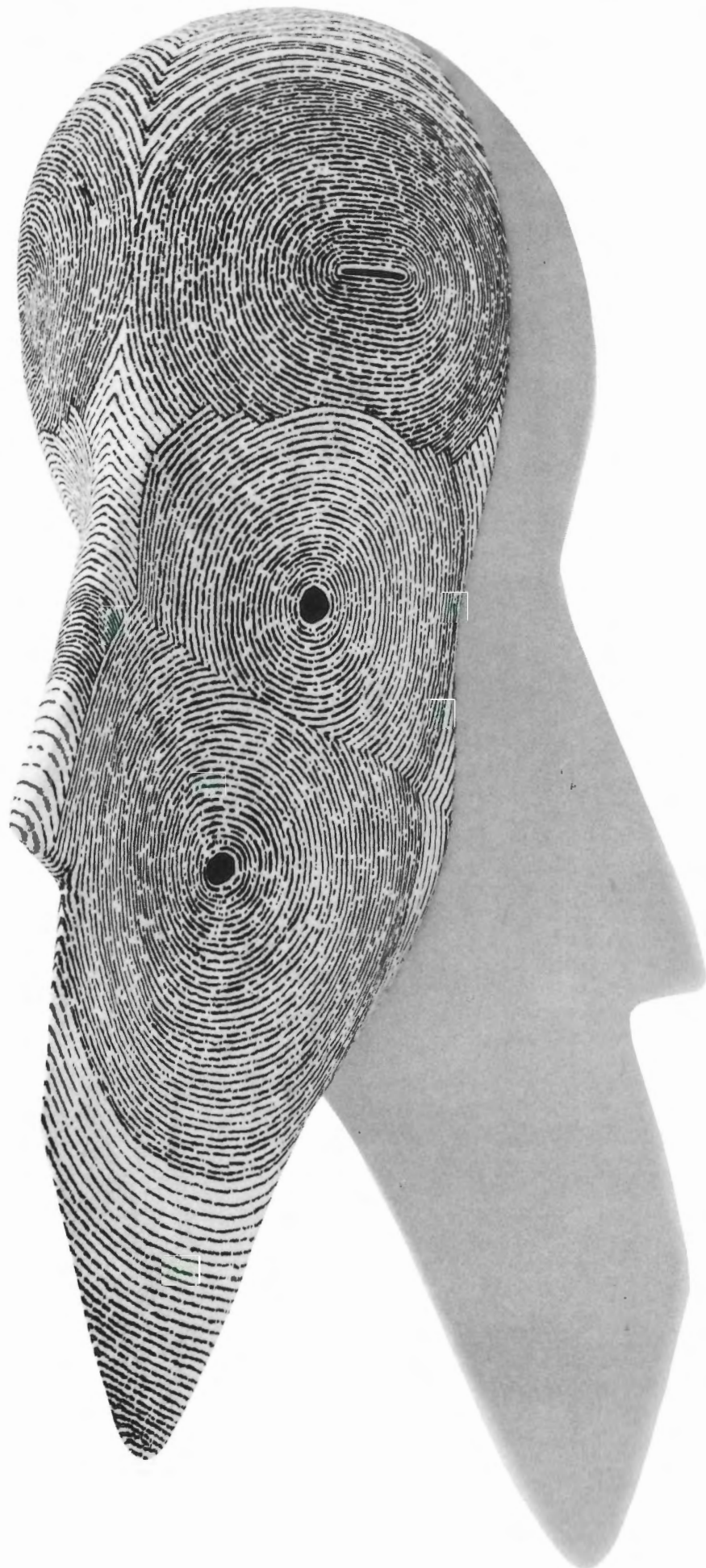
Billy (1975), 53½" (134 cm) high. Courtesy Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco, and Newport Harbor Museum, Newport Beach.



Mask (1982), 18" x 12" x 9" (45 x 30 x 23 cm). Collection Allan Chasanoff, New York. Photo: Susie Cushner.

Untitled (1982), 25" x 8" x 11¼" (63 x 20 x 30 cm). Collection Daniel Jacobs, New York. Photo: David Lisanti.







Alto Mask (1980), 13" x 12" x 5½" (33 x 30 x 14 cm). Collection Daniel Jacobs, New York. Photo: Malcolm Varon.

Sira (1984), 59" x 21" x 9" (148 x 53 x 23 cm). Courtesy Braunstein Gallery, San Francisco. Photo: White Line Photography.



Frank Fleming

Janet Koplos

Frank Fleming's newest sculpture series was inspired by Picasso's great painting *Guernica*, the cry of pain from the Spanish Civil War. Fleming's pain comes from the dread of nuclear war. As always, he expresses himself through the bodies of animal-men. One might imagine these animal-human blends to be the result of radioactive genetic mutation, perhaps; their form contributes to his theme. Yet the form is not new to Fleming. Previously it has been treated as surreal, as witty, as folksy. Always his concentration is on image. Certainly these are sculptures, three-dimensional and multi-viewpoint, but they do not deal with mass or with displacement or activation of space. They are pictorial, illustrative, and they hone inward, on refinement and nuance, rather than outward, on dimension or gesture. It is tempting to see the widening ripples of Fleming's work as having diffused from individual to regional to planetary, but such an oversimplification would limit the scope of his earlier work. His "personal mythologies," for example, consist of animals behaving like people (or animals that are part people) often set in tableaux of ironic seriousness, with poses or props harking back to ancient religions, to Christianity, or to American folklore. An example is *Savior Penguin* (1977), in which the impassive penguin, staff in one hand and text in the other, is attended by a two-headed dog; or *The Peace Keeper* (1982), in which a meditative rabbit in archaic clothing keeps company with a winged dog. Many of these works have specific meanings to Fleming, reflecting friends and acquaintances. Those readings are not clear to the viewer, but no one could miss Fleming's multiple historical and social references, and his alternating tones of gentle mocking and tranquility. As representations, these works are never real *en toto*, but are disconcertingly real in bits and pieces—the paws, veins, beaks, nails, ears, feathers, hands, muscles. Fleming's communicative vocabulary is the irregularity of bodies rather than the perfection of geometry, and he emphasizes the variety through this fantastic combination of parts. The representation is abstracted by his use of uncolored, and later

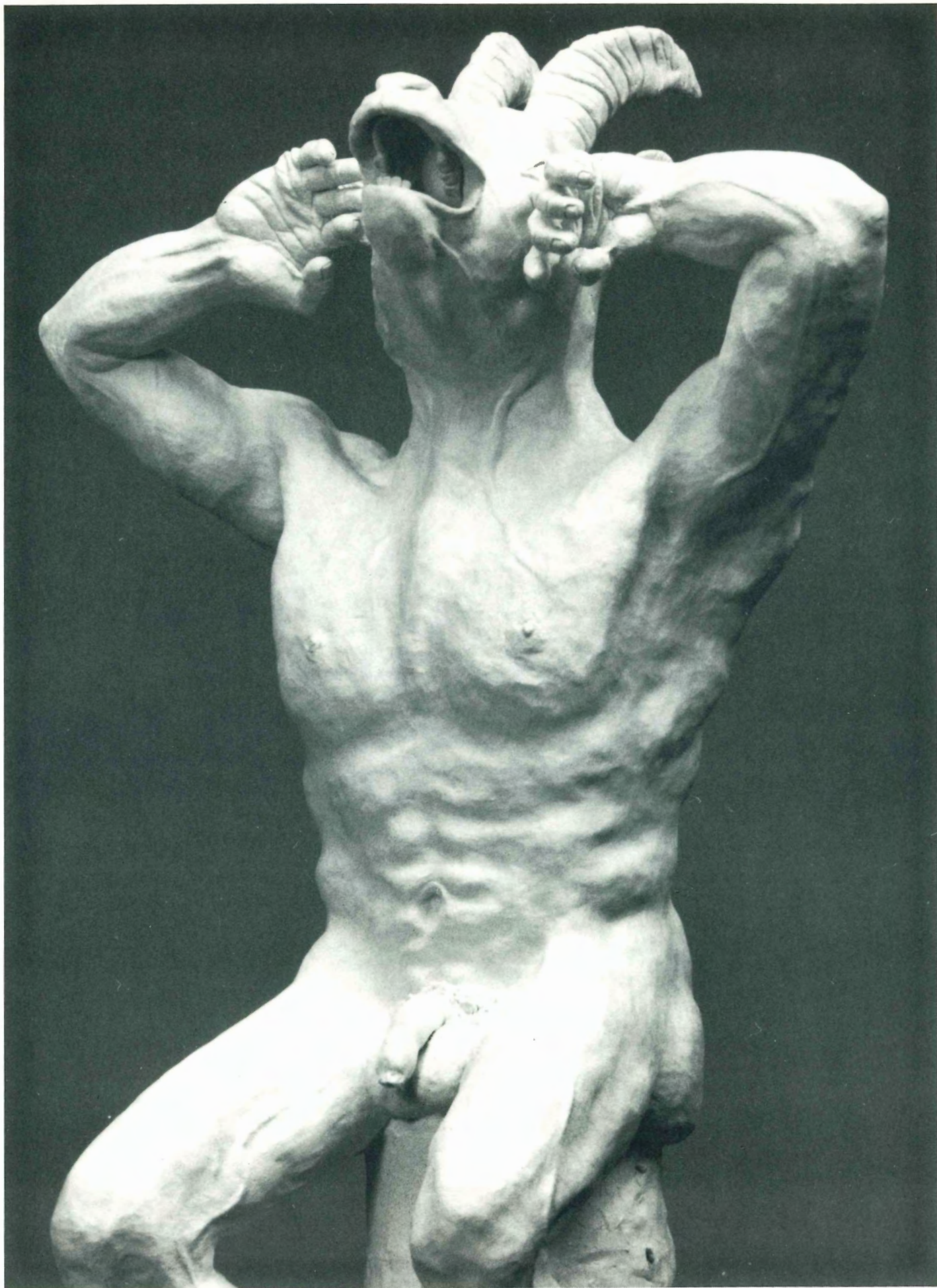
unglazed, porcelain, so that the precision of pristine surface stands in contrast to the flaws of bodily form. Also, the blank, unemotional whiteness is at odds with the detail of the sculptures, and that creates a peculiar, resonant tension that gives the works a presence surprising for their modest scale.

Even in the "personal mythologies," which generally have a serious mood, an undercurrent of humor is often present, usually ironic. A more recent body of work, shown in 1984 at Heath Gallery in Atlanta, pushed the humor in the direction of a looney, cracker dementia. Many of these works have a specific regional identification. They could only have come from the South, and probably would only have taken such an exuberantly defiant tone in the South's current climate of intense focus on geographic self-identity, which began in literature and spread to the visual arts.

Fleming's *magnum opus* in this genre is his *Southern Triptych* of twenty-inch wall plates. They achieve such a pinnacle of tacky, mocking self-righteousness that even the natives encountering them at the Heath Gallery laughed in recognition. The centerpiece of each is a fat and sassy jumping catfish (background music: "Summertime") above a circlet inscription reading "American by birth, Southern by the grace of God" (background music: "Dixie").

On the first plate, *Catfish Jumping Out of Dixie*, we see the fish on a map of the Southeastern states with a notation reminding us that Alabama, Fleming's home, is the heart of Dixie. But catfish foolishly leaves. The parable continues: in the second plate we find catfish in "Neverwhereverland" Fleming finds his revenge on Saul Steinberg's famous cartoon depicting the New Yorker's view of the U.S. by leaving New York off his map completely, and only vaguely acknowledging California and the Great Lakes. Finally, a wiser catfish jumps back into Dixie (the Alabama notation is now reversed—did the prodigal sunfish have to return home by the back door?). These plates are both an avowal of devotion to homeland (a Southerner out of the South is like a fish out of water) and a







Screamer Goat #1 (1982–1984), 52" x 14" x 15" (130 x 35 x 38 cm). Photo: George Flemming.

Dog Hand (1982–1984), 54" x 19" x 19" (135 x 48 x 48 cm). Courtesy Billy Caldwell. Photo: George Flemming.

The Soul Screamer (1982), 25 1/4" x 29" x 14"
(65 x 73 x 35 cm). Courtesy Innes Tarrt.
Photo: George Flemming.

(Pages 30–31) Another Cup of Tea, Please
(1977), 11" x 15" x 9" (28 x 38 x 23 cm).
Private collection.

fractious homage to Fleming's ceramic heritage. They are instantly recognizable as derivative of Luca Della Robbia's Renaissance terra-cotta reliefs, the garlands transformed into dinner-plate garnishes of okra, figs, and acorns, and the Virgin Mary transformed into a saucy, whiskered fish. A related work, *Stilled Life*, shows the familiar catfish swallowing a frog. This is probably a perverse homage to David Gilhooly, whom Fleming acknowledges as an influence (along with Bosch—such a pairing!). Another work from this time period hints at a darker side of Fleming's vision more fully expressed in his most recent works. This is the *Monument to Southern Corn*, a cluster of tiny farm buildings huddling together like a miniature medieval village. An upright corncob forms the silo, and the bricks and shingles of other buildings bear an unmistakable kinship to kernels of corn. The scale, detail, and tree-stump setting are reminiscent of Jack Earl's work, but the perspective is Fleming's own. There is something spooky about this piece: the restricted vision of the windows, the inward turning of the buildings, the lack of outside reference, even the colorlessness common to all Fleming's works here takes on a dismal cast. This is not a place one would wish to be.

Neither is Fleming's post-nuclear world. The whiteness of his works now identifies a skeletal quality, and a bloodless, mortified, stony flesh with ghostly memories of alabaster purity. That Carrara immaculateness as well as the exquisite musculature of the bodies speaks of Michelangelo. The figures perch atop tree-like pedestals, monuments of the natural world, which raise them to approximately eye-level, where they can be apprehended most directly.

The theme of these sculptures is soundless screaming.

The figures take many forms. There are men with hooves and goat heads, there are dogs with goat heads, there are huge hands on which each fingertip has evolved into an animal, there are hybrid fish-snake-bird creatures that wrap around the pedestals. The figures raise their hands in denial, or they throw back their heads to cry out. One

recognizes the flaring nostrils and bulging eyes of Picasso's terrified Guernica horse, magnified and multiplied.

Yet for all its intensity, this group of works is not unrelievedly negative. Ironically, Fleming's attention to form and detail in the beautiful bodies mediates between horror and poignancy. We see the veins that are the paths of their lifeblood. We see the bone structure common to all Earth's animals.

We see the thinness of skin, the fragility of feathers, and their susceptibility to damage. A few pieces, particularly the huge hands with transformed fingertips, suggest the dissociation of flesh from bone: things that are unified are coming apart. The trees, the animals, the humans are carelessly tossed, pointlessly damaged. And pervading all the broken, wounded, beautiful flesh is a breathless silence.

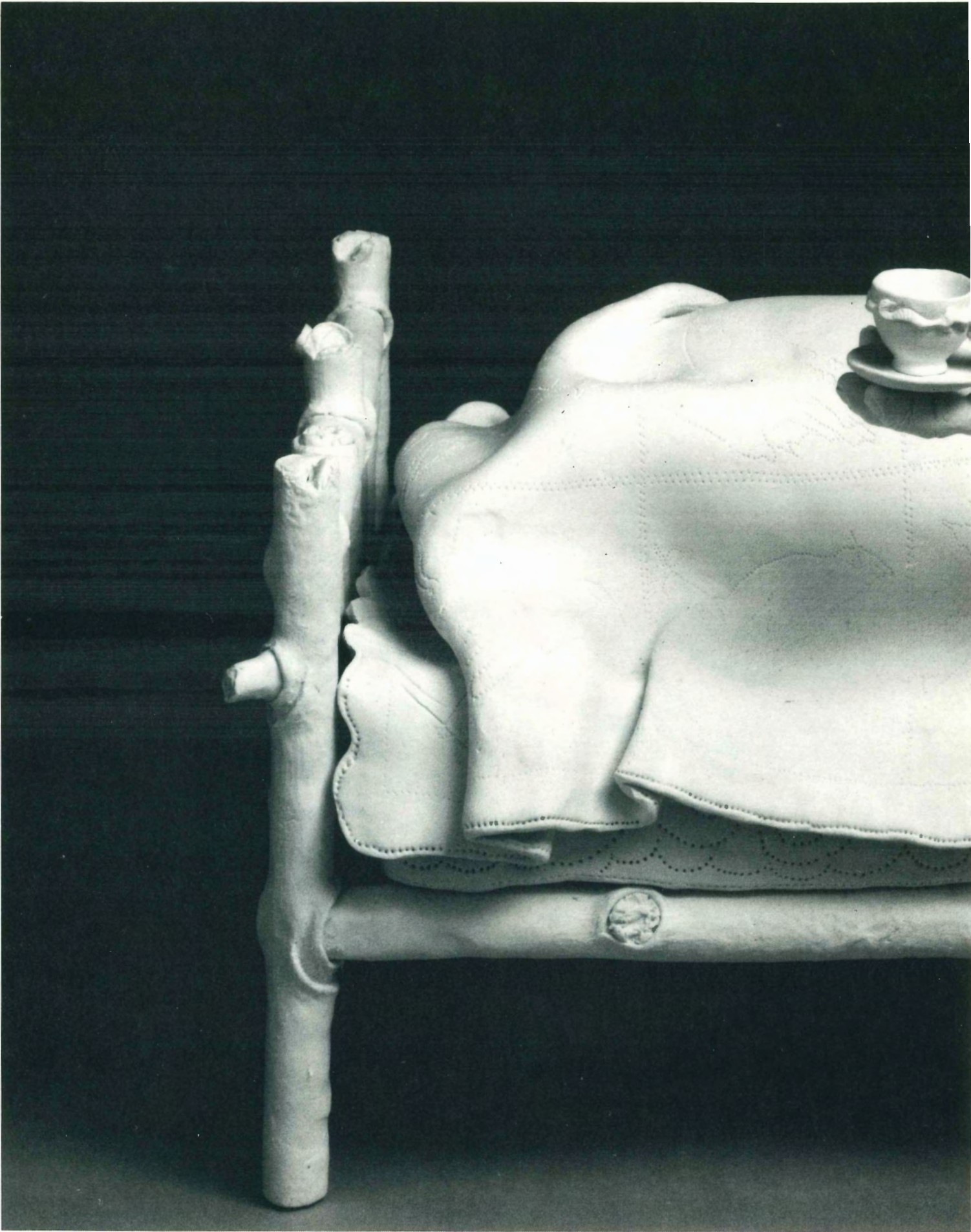
This is a grand theme, an epic, universal scope that escapes cliché because Fleming communicates the passion of his concern. It is a measure of their power that the works do not function best in concert. Rather, each is solitary. To see the works together is not to see a group, but to receive a series of separate blows.

Throughout, Fleming finds his meaning in emotion, not fact. These are not tracts to lecture us, although they variously focus on moral, social, and political issues. Fleming grasps the emotion and wrings every ounce of power from it, but requires the viewer to do the thinking forward and backward from the point of expression. Thus the works are open, multi-vocal, and consequently capable of involving the viewer. They become richer with repeated viewing because they are packed with suggestion and possibility rather than statement.

And one final fillip. It is unnecessary to know anything about Fleming as a person to be moved by his work, but I must say as an addendum that his personal history is as astonishing as his art. One of seven children of an illiterate Alabama corn and cotton farmer, Fleming evaded the normal course of events—for example, moving to Detroit to get a good-paying job on an assembly line—only because his childhood stuttering made him eligible for speech therapy at college, and college opened to him a new









world of options. That's an incredible distance to have come. Fleming has not cut off his roots: he values the land and knows animals, like any farm child; he reveres his mother's "natural intelligence" and common sense; he raises most of his food and wins state-fair blue ribbons with it. So many contemporary artists—especially in clay and fiber—have sought connection with the land, simple living, nature's forms. In Fleming, that connection is not affectation or intellectual longing, but natural history. He is a direct descendant. But it is the sophistication of his knowledge of art history and his awareness of contemporary dilemmas, a rare and successful grafting onto that natural root stock, that gives his works their universality. The layers of allusions connect across time and space and are a means of interlocking rather than separating or individuating the artist. This art is not ego, but a remarkable wholeness.

Frank Fleming is represented by Garth Clark Gallery, New York and Los Angeles; Fendrick Gallery, Washington, DC; Heath Gallery, Atlanta; Holsten Galleries, Palm Beach and Stockbridge, MA; Moody Gallery, Houston; and Morgan Gallery, Kansas City. The Guernica Series was exhibited in April at the University of Georgia Art Gallery, Athens.

Janet Koplos, a frequent contributor to American Ceramics and several other art journals, now resides in Tokyo, Japan.





War Survivor (1982–1984), 20¼" x 4"
(51 x 10 cm).

Catfish in Neverwherever Land (1983), 20½"
x 6" (52 x 15 cm). Courtesy Heath Gallery,
Atlanta.

May Pots Survive Their Writers

Jack Troy

This is one of the most necessary, yet potentially polarizing, and, for me, one of the most exasperating ceramics books to appear in recent years. Philip Rawson's *Ceramics* will become a standard reference for students and teachers of ceramic art history, though only the most patient, fastidious readers will discover how this intensive, well-planned work occupies a territory all its own in the literature.¹ Ceramics books for the past thirty years have been so preoccupied with the "how" of the subject that the "why" had become almost a vestigial issue, so Rawson's book goes straight to the heart of our need to know, our hunger for the "hidden life" of pots—that dimension we learn about vicariously as we discover how objects can be authenticated through study, as well as through intimate use and daily contact by their owners. As a contributor to the tidal wave of clay objects in which America is awash, I find this insight by an articulate "consumer" valuable. Clay merchandising on all levels has brought with it bewilderment on the part of many beholders who justifiably ask, "What is all this amazing stuff *about*, anyway? Leery of intuitive inklings, befuddled with that peculiar loneliness that accompanies incomprehension, we need our hunches buttressed with paragraphs of solid scholarship, for only when an art object is verbally validated can it assume status as a commodity with aesthetic merit in our culture. Also, on a more personal level, we need to look closely at that synapse that occurs in encounters with remarkable pots: is it simply magic, or magic we can articulate?

Rawson's work is cut out for him. He involves us with ceramic objects from the past, enlarging the ways we accommodate them in our lives while attempting to overcome the damnable handicap of a pot's existing in only one place at a time. (As opposed to poems, for example, which occur undiminished by endless duplication.) Through his sketches, photographs, and perceptions, we comprehend pots in new, enlarged ways, even though we are thousands of miles and centuries removed from their cultural milieu. In fact, one eerie aspect of all this is that the objects being described needn't even exist for readers to "understand" them—we take them on faith, trusting in their explicator. When Rawson zeroes in on such issues as one civilization's preference for particular ceramic forms, as he does when discussing modes of articulation in compound pots, he lets us see how European, Islamic, and Oriental potters favored styles he classifies as juxtaposition, continuity, and elision, respectively. That is, European potters often made forms in which junctions between components are clearly visible and capitalized upon, whereas Middle Eastern potters put less stress on this type of vertical metering by coordinating the elements of their forms. In the Orient, elision, the most rhythmical mode, was adopted, resulting in components that flow into each other when the pot is seen in profile. These principles of ceramic taxonomy help us see pottery forms and values as indigenous; unique, in much the way that insect nests like those of termites, ants, and bees vary from one biome to the next.

Rawson's probity shows us how color connotations are rooted in

cultural perceptions—especially important in viewing smaller objects to which there is tactile as well as visual access. He suggests that to Peruvians, black surfaces may have erotic overtones because it is the color of their hair; whereas in torrid India, where shadows are equated with coolness, or in China, where the same color seems to have symbolized the fertile darkness of the earth or womb, black is not merely a color or an "effect," but a powerful evocative factor in comprehending pottery. (He suggests that post-Christian Europeans gave the color its deathly or funereal symbolism.)

Bright green glazes, cool to the touch, and imagery pertaining to liquids were favored by Islamic potters, desert dwellers for whom water was a vital substance. Rawson is keen to point out such color references in regard to the full palette available to potters in many regions. He is conversant with discoveries or techniques underlying specific effects, such as complimentary colors and after images. Unwavering in his aim to get at the *human* origins of work, he differs from historians who might emphasize the role of changing technologies.

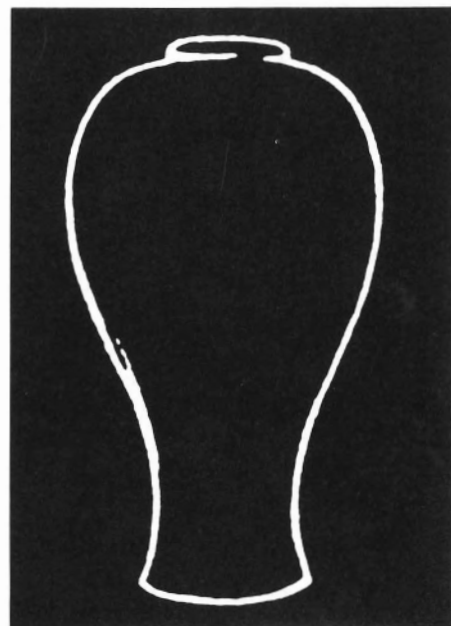
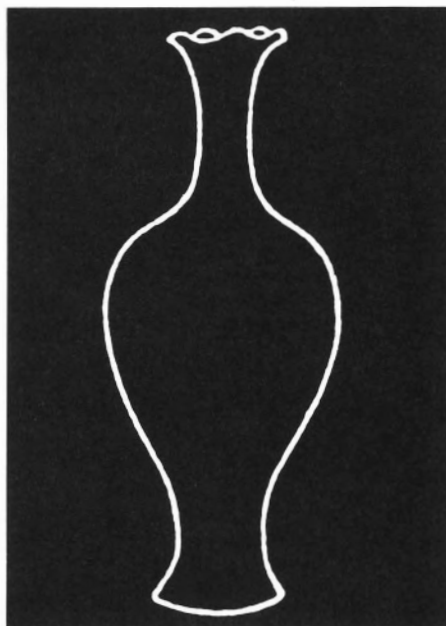
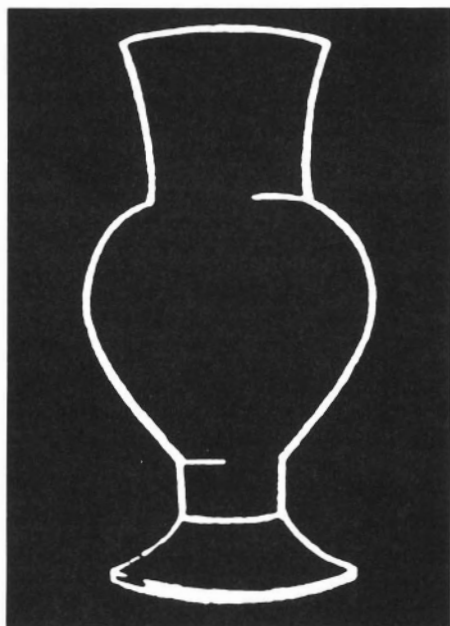
*Even though pottery must be based on technology of some kind, if it is good pottery it always eludes the tyranny of technology... good pottery can never use technology in a scientific way... instead the resources are deployed and improvements sought ultimately for the sake of human needs... within the life of the human beings who use the pot.*²

No other writer goes to such lengths to get at the underlying reasons why pots are made in the particular configurations they are. Rawson's morphology of pottery forms illustrated on pages 94–95 is graphic evidence of the ways in which potters have elaborated on basic shapes much the way that speciation in birds and mammals has evolved. To study this chart is to be reminded that virtually no pottery form exists in isolation; to the discerning eye there are phylogenetic similarities among all pots.

One of Rawson's primary aims is to develop higher levels of awareness among persons who seek to learn about clay objects; who care to investigate some of the underlying reasons, speculative as they must be, why we are drawn to certain pieces at all. It is in this mode that Rawson is perhaps most intriguing, for he reckons that we are practitioners of existential, symbolic language, elements of which we recognize in ceramic objects. By means of a "silent language," we identify with certain objects because of their relationship, for example, to parts of our bodies. His observations on body images in Part III, "Symbolism of Form," clearly demonstrate the kind of anthropocentric projection that may lead us toward certain pieces—as if, in beholding them, we participate in a symbolic self-confirmation or recognition.

The author has a way of tantalizing us with some baited phrases, and readers may wish, as I do, that he had elaborated on several of the points he raises: "Some pots may even produce a sense of dream

The three principal modes of vessel articulation are (left to right): juxtaposition (typical of European pottery), continuity (Islamic), and elision (Oriental).



or surreal-reality, an intuition of connections between our experiences of sensuous realities which our pigeon-holing, utilitarian attitude has never allowed us to recognize before."³ Which pots? By not following up, Rawson avoids an important element in our study—the aesthetic mutations that challenge classification. Without more than this passing nod, he reinforces the very pigeon-holing he cites. Among contemporary ceramists there is an eclecticism approaching anarchy, yet the elements of surrealism are alive and well. Some illustrations of its antecedents from other cultures could establish this territory of the imagination as an expressive mode common to a variety of peoples.

I also wonder what pots he had in mind when he wrote about European potters who fail in their attempts to emulate the linear articulation seen in pots from the Far East: "even the most distinguished of modern artist-potters have been by no means immune."⁴

"It is not surprising... that many potters working today for wealthy modern aesthetes feel obliged to aim at a visual, aristocratic, purely showcase brilliance which will fit in with one or other of the recognized branches of "visible virtue" which the individual collector wishes to attach to his person."⁵ So saying, Rawson shows the continuing role of patronage among ceramists and touches on the issue of ceramics as "noble treasure." He is obviously just as interested in *why* pots exist as he is in the ways they do.

Rawson brings intellectual credibility to a field where some ceramists will welcome it more than others, for there exists among clay practitioners a wide range of attitudes toward anything approaching the kind of analysis at which the author excels. (He is capable of telling some of his readership far more than they may care to know, though their resistance may diminish if he writes as exhaustively about contemporary ceramics as he does in this book on historical ceramics.)

Ceramics may be a kind of fulcrum, its concepts prying away a segment of the clay community in a way Rawson never intended, because the book implies that ceramics is a field to be perceived by intensive verbal and intellectual analysis—a shaky proposition. It is likely to find favor among those who make "objects that refer to the vessel" rather than with potters who make cups for real tea. Clay workers closest to the trunk of the ceramics "tree" may categorize this book as being out on the twiggy ends of the aesthetics branch. Writers such as M. C. Richards and Paulus Berensohn, who have implied that pottery itself can be an adjunct to making the person, may feel the book to be too much an effort of the left brain for their liking. Rawson's analysis of forms, for example, has an air of Prussian didacticism in it, seeming to originate in an authority figure wearing a mortarboard and pointing a long tapered stick at what are essentially mute, enigmatic pieces of shaped, baked mud. Yet Rawson himself realizes the limits of language:

And so the problem of this book will always be that it is dealing with imponderables and unnameables. The text must amount to a

*sustained and varied invitation to the reader to use his own intuition.*⁶

There will always be those among us who subscribe to William Carlos Williams's dictum, "no ideas but in things,"⁷ and whose comprehension of ceramics is mainly kinetic, tactile, first hand, nonverbal. Their personal discoveries, through making and musing, no matter how limited in scope, may provide all they need in the way of insight into the aesthetics of the field simply because these intimate resources may be all they can honestly comprehend and translate into their own growth through work. I am not referring here to ceramists who market multiple clones of their own prototypes and won't buy the book because it contains no glaze formulas, but to those clay workers who are philosophically redneck positivists—at the opposite end of the spectrum from Rawson, a white-collar phenomenologist. Such persons tend to conceive of aesthetics in a visceral rather than an intellectual manner. While working my way through this book, I often toasted all those anonymous illiterate potters, articulate only in their charged potent wares that teased so many thoughts out of this voluble Englishman.

I read this book four times and wrote four reviews of it. The total effect is divisive: the teacher in me wants to distribute a couple dozen copies and arrange a symposium under pines or redwoods, to discuss its salient issues. The potter in me wants to shake it vigorously over my pugmill to see whether any of Rawson's concepts can become integrated in my work, or whether this is a read for its own sake. The writer in me wants to edit the book ruthlessly but supportively, or wants to see a *Cliff's Notes* version, or wishes it had been an "as told to" book with Daniel Rhodes at the word processor.

Rawson's style, for many readers, will be a rough row to hoe. His prose too often lacks the passion he may feel in the presence of strong pots, and it is only with irony that I concur with Wayne Higby's opening sentence of the foreword: "It is rare to find a book on art that presents complex aesthetic principles in clear readable form." The further I read, the rarer became the "clear readable form." Rawson is capable of lucid prose, but far too often his verbose academic abracadabra needs to be shaken by the scruff of the neck into coherency. As Wallace Stevens admonishes, "The words of things entangle and confuse." The plum survives its poems.⁸ I got off to a bad start by opening the book at random to page 173 and noting that a Greek pot's top had been cut off in printing. Then I read two consecutive sentences on the facing page, neither of which would get past a freshman composition reader. One is severely crippled grammatically, and both suffer from Rawson's having used the word "of" eight times:

*They call for imaginative visual projection on our part of the subject matter of the surface design out of the order of visual reality which the pot occupies into another. In all of them we will find that it is the vertical axis of the pot which supplies the fixed point of reference for the world of figurative imagery.*⁹

The first sentence is pure gibberish, and I take the second to mean simply, "the pot's vertical axis is always a locus for figurative imagery"—a gain of eighteen fewer words over the original. This isn't meant to be picky, but to forewarn other readers who haven't been inoculated to clunky prose, as Wayne Higby apparently has, and who are entitled to expect greater clarity from a man of Rawson's stature. For all his erudition and insight, he hides the fruits of his thought in vast verbal thickets that need severe pruning. Time and again I hoped for the directness of which Rhodes is capable:

*The pot is centered about its cavity.*¹⁰

Instead, Rawson relates almost precisely the same concept:

*Each formal unit going to make up a whole pot can be interpreted as a pair of opposed contours, seen in elevation, which contain between them a cell of space. The convex unit, which is here taken as the principle type, seems always, in the major traditions, to have been given contours so shaped that the solid form they produce in clay, around the pot's axis of revolution, is continuously convex in all directions.*¹¹

This bloodless, claustrophobic style, maintained for over two hundred pages, creates a pronounced uphill slant to the reading terrain. My dynamic ambivalence about this book is that it can be so disorientingly *mental*; yet I wouldn't deny its place, if only to balance out the hip glib inarticulateness of the 1970s. In those days, for better or worse, a pot was a pot, not "an object deriving from a personal imagistic base with strong reference to the vessel aesthetic," as grad-school-based clay work is often characterized. Clay's fundamental attractiveness is acquiring verbal makeup, gaining the stature only intellectual respectability can accord; certainly Rawson has assisted clay's coming of age with this mighty effort. What is so seductive in his analysis is that the pots appear to transcend themselves through the power of language, becoming exalted commodities with pedigrees guaranteed by a hierarchy of critics. In these matters, we need always be drawn back to the pots themselves; to the ticks and tocks of our personal aesthetic Geiger counters, as Rawson himself is. Still, it seems to me that we should read about pots only when we have nothing better to do, and it is my hope that we may mostly have something better to do. Perhaps the bottom line in this matter of verbalized pots is Rilke's observation that:

*With nothing can one approach a work of art so little as with critical words: they always come down to more or less happy misunderstandings. Things are not all so comprehensible and expressible as one would mostly have us believe; most events are inexpressible, taking place in a realm which no word has ever entered, and more inexpressible than all else are works of art, mysterious existences, the life of which, while ours passes away, endures.*¹²

1. Actually, this edition of *Ceramics* by Rawson is a reissue, with an added introduction by Wayne Higby, of the first edition published in 1972 by Oxford University Press.

2. Philip Rawson, *Ceramics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 68–69.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

7. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 14.

8. Wallace Stevens, "The Comedian as the Letter 'C,'" *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

9. Rawson, p. 172.

10. Daniel Rhodes, *Pottery Form* (Radnor, Pennsylvania: Chilton, 1976), p. 231.

11. Rawson, p. 104.

12. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, translation by M.D. Herter Norton, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1954), p. 17.

Ceramics, by Philip Rawson, was first published by Oxford University Press in 1971. The first paperback edition (224 pp.) was published in 1984 by the University of Pennsylvania Press, with 88 black-and-white illustrations and a foreword by Wayne Higby. Single copies are available for \$9.95 from the U of P Press, 3933 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

Pennsylvania potter Jack Troy is well known for his work in Salt-Glazed Ceramics, but since 1977, the year his book on the subject was published by Watson-Guptill, he began exploring anagama, wood-fired pottery. "Theirs is the beauty of old baseball gloves," Troy says of the anagama pots, "as opposed to the 'uncirculated coin' variety one encounters with sophisticated porcelains. Fire brings out the character of certain clays the way that years of quilting lends unique qualities to the hands of old Amish women."

Surreal or So Real? The Little Worlds of Patti Warashina

Louise Klemperer



I began studying pottery in 1960, but one of the main reasons I made pots was to use them as canvasses for painting. During my undergraduate years at the University of Washington [BFA: 1962], I was influenced by the paintings of Klee, Gorky, and Miró. Also, I was very interested in Surrealism. I made simple functional pottery with lots of surface decoration, but I also got into handbuilding more complex shapes. Then, in graduate school at the University of Washington [MFA: 1964], I built a series of life-sized, ornate chairs and a series of fantastic machines, which were inspired by Nevelson's sculptures. In 1965, lowfire glazes were almost never used by clay artists, but I wanted bright colors, so I worked with acrylic paints. A few years later I started to use lowfire glazes, although occasionally I still painted with acrylic.

Voulikos, Abstract Expressionism, and the Big Gesture were "in" then, but even though I admired Voulikos, I never was comfortable with Abstract Expressionism, never felt it was really me. Who I really admired was Kenny Price—a renegade for that time with big egg shapes with worms and his hard edges.... Maybe that's where my egg and worm images began. His work was very polished and I liked it a lot.

By 1968, the bread loaf form I had been using as a basic structure for my hollow, stacked boxes had transformed into a turkey shape, so I made a few turkey forms. Also, my first car piece appeared, and my Car Kiln series began. In 1970, I started my present job of teaching at the University of Washington and...

Upon looking through twenty years of Patti Warashina's work, and listening to her narration of its evolution, the first impression is one of incredible variety—of clay, glaze, format, and subject matter. A thorough researcher can easily get led astray by the constant stream of transforming images—miniature abstract forms, everyday objects, and body parts; and sculpted or painted tableaux of extremely busy people involved in the strangest activities—and lose sight of the recurring themes. Warashina explains, "I'm interested in lots of motion. In actuality, life is never still, people's mouths are always open. I want my figures to be parts of little worlds, little cosmos...."

Some people work and work to refine one idea; but my stuff is more like a camera snapshot—the whole world is out there, so why do it twice? ... At the present time, I find it fascinating to read newspapers and watch TV—my resource material is all out there on the street and I don't have to make anything up! I don't like the soaps or comedies, I just watch the news! There's a kidnapping; change channels and it's a hijacking; one more flip of the switch and it's a comedy. In my art, I'm trying to capture the absurdities of real life—its Boschlike quality.

Having an eye for the extraordinary, Warashina keeps a box of news clippings on subjects such as Siamese twins, on twins so in tune with each other that when one starts a sentence, the other finishes it; on religious subjects such as the Shroud of

Turin. (Clippings on religious subjects are treasured not because religion is important to Warashina, but because its obsession for other people fascinates her.)

Or, consider her description of a trip she made to Las Vegas: "I saw a floor show with the girls coming out on Harley Davidsons, stark nude, and three treadmills with guys galloping on horses with smokescreens covering up the treadmills. The world is filled with surreal stuff right here in front of your nose!"

Arranging her work in chronological order helps us see several related patterns in format, theme, or image. While some of these are contiguous in time, others appear intermittently throughout her career. Due to the careful craftsmanship, humorous titles, startling scenarios, but most especially to the peculiar quality of action-packed intensity to be found in most of her work, each piece seems a definitive, if bizarre, statement of the subject at hand. Warashina's major works divide roughly into five main groups. First there are the small monuments of surrealistically juxtaposed American kitsch—*Moon Dog Dream* and *Ketchup Kiss* (both 1969), and the Turkey forms—decorated in as brilliant and flashy colors as Madison Avenue's version of the American Dream. Then in 1971, Warashina began a series of car kilns (kilns whose shelves roll out on wheels for easy loading and unloading), often combined in improbable ways with automobiles. *Metamorphosis of a Car Kiln* (1971) literally depicts a car driving into a brick kiln, acquiring a skin of bricks as it does so. (That the word "kiln" is usually pronounced



Ketchup Kiss (ca. 1969), 36" (90 cm) high, lowfire clay, glazes, luster. Collection of the artist. Photo: Roger Schreiber.

Untitled altar (ca. 1973), 16" x 16" x 16" (40 x 40 x 40 cm), lowfire clay, underglaze. Collection of the artist. Photo: Roger Schreiber.

"kill" by potters lends a macabre note to this series.) A little later, Warashina began employing the pyramid form. By 1975, it had become a pyramid-shaped stack of boxes carefully painted with portraits of people or images from the artist's domestic life transformed into fantasies. On the front side of *Love It or Leave It* (1974–1975), we see a smiling woman holding a huge knife, about to cut a cake decorated with "7th" (Warashina's own seventh wedding anniversary); festive ribbons trail around the cake, but on the reverse side the ribbons become flattened electrical wires, plugged into the robotlike woman. In 1976, Warashina began her Altar series—two-dimensional slabs painted with the torsos and faces of hysterically grinning women. In *Wash and Wear* (1976), for example, a woman washing clothes in a wooden bucket wears a clothesline fastened to her shoulders. Many of the other women offer food in their outstretched arms—usually the only part of their bodies fully modeled in three dimensions. Warashina says she made these altars to honor women and their work, but to my eyes the tombstone-shaped slabs resemble imprisoning graves and the only living or real dimension (made concrete by being fully modeled) in these women's lives is their role as domestic servants. Warashina's most recent body of work dates from 1978, when she began making small white figures situated in little tableaux or environments. In the earliest of these, women dispatch kitchen utensils as big as themselves; later, disguised with wings or bird-beak masks, they are shown flying or nesting; most

recently, asexual figures crawl through mazes with rats, or burrow through underground labyrinths.²

The subject matter of Warashina's work has led many people to label her a feminist—a characterization that she feels is only half true. Explaining the genesis of the Car Kiln series, she says, "When I was in school, the conversations about kiln construction and BTUs were aimed at men. It was assumed that women were china painters and would get married, stay at home, and have babies, while the clay world belonged to the men. I say this with no blame or judgment, but there was a macho feeling... maybe it was Voulkos and Abstract Expressionism. In reaction to this macho attitude, I started making my own kilns!" But later in this interview she also said, "I never saw the car in my earlier work as macho male—the car reminds me more of just any human, especially the '30s and '40s cars with their flowing curves. For me, each car seems to have a personality and becomes identified with its owner."

As for the automaton lady serving anniversary cake and the women in the subsequent Altar series, Warashina explains:

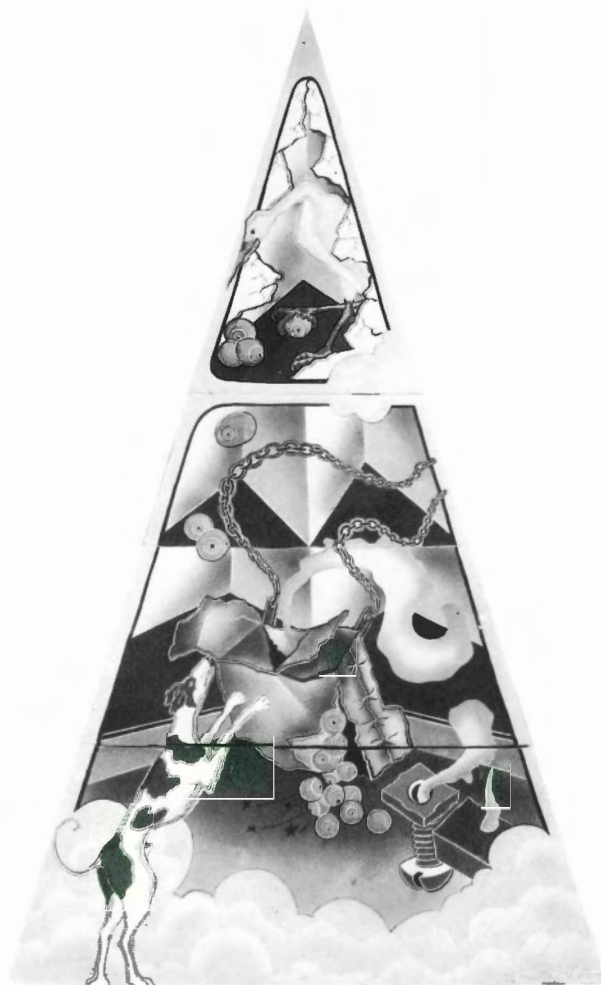
Love It or Leave It was made after my divorce. It was the only piece that directly refers to my first marriage. In my Altar series, I was reworking material from my marriage, but didn't consciously do it, it just came out. The big issue for me was not Women's Lib per se—I certainly wasn't a serious crusader—I was just working out problems

in my own life, or situations of my friends with which I identified, in my sculptures.

Looking at her work all together now, the early cars and kilns may certainly be taken as a comment on the macho male world, on which Warashina took humorous revenge by making the cars come to ignoble ends, while the crazed women of the Altar pieces were victims of the other half of the stereotyped male/female dichotomy. Both men and women were equally unfulfilled and trapped by following such narrowly prescribed roles. Anger, though politely veiled by humor, is certainly perceptible in the Altar series. What is meaningful to this writer is not the autobiographical anger of one woman towards one man, but the more general anger at our culture's ideals, as well as anger at oneself for being duped into thinking that if you played an assigned role, happiness would invariably follow. In this stage, with the woman performing menial duties and the men seen as car-machines no real relationship is possible. Then, coincident with Warashina's next relationship and second marriage, a border is crossed in the White Figure series. In *Branding Iron* (1978), a grinning woman rides a giant iron, as if she were a cowboy astride his horse, triumphantly holding its "reins"—the iron's undulating cord, which rises above her head and ends in a giant plug. In *Crossing the Border* (1978), a man helps a woman push a huge iron over a precipice. The earlier implied tension between the stereotyped sexes is gone. Then, in *Nest Syndrome*, (ca. 1979), a woman with strapped-on wings and a bird

The Great Olive War (1975), 31" x 15" x 15"
(78 x 38 x 38 cm), lowfire clay, underglaze,
glaze. Collection King County Arts
Commission.

Wash and Wear (1976), 30" x 18" x 15" (75 x
45 x 38 cm). lowfire clay, underglaze and
glaze. Collection Audrey Strohl.



mask tilted above her head delicately alights upon a tree. She is attracted to a "nest"—a hammock that has a male face peeping out and extremities of hands and feet. On his mid-region lies a large egg. Here, the woman is free and must be drawn to the nest by the homebodied male.

Other works deal with male-female relationships mostly from the woman's point of view, for the man is frequently absent. Gleeful women trash their domestic implements, hurling huge forks through their Plexiglas boxes or dumping crockery on the ground. They seem not as much in revolt against men as against their stereotyped roles. In these pieces, a woman wearing fastened-on wings attempts to fly (Warashina had read Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* about this time), or is attracted to or is residing in a nest, where an egg is sometimes present.

If woman is no longer defined by her relationship to man or by her social roles, however, then who is she? Part of her implicit definition in the Car Kiln and Altar series had been as the opposing half (symbolically expressed) of a male-female polarity. But in the White Figure series, there is such harmony between the sexes that this definition no longer holds. Warashina directly addresses the issue of identity in *Loss of Identity* (1980), where one woman, in removing the covering sheets from another, also removes her face, which she gleefully reveals to the horrified, faceless mannequin. And in *Flying Shrouds* (1979), a group of women dressed in sheets runs wildly around a fire, their facial features becoming one with their sheets.

Identity is gained, in many of these works, by women going about their business totally without reference to men. They are happily busy in their own world, as contented as farm women at a sewing bee. The women are naked, but this nakedness suggests innocence or rebirth rather than sexual provocation. Most of the women look alike. Has the newly liberated woman lost her identity to a group identification with her "sisters?" More likely, they are similar because they are all little Warashinas—personifications of her various fantasies and concerns.

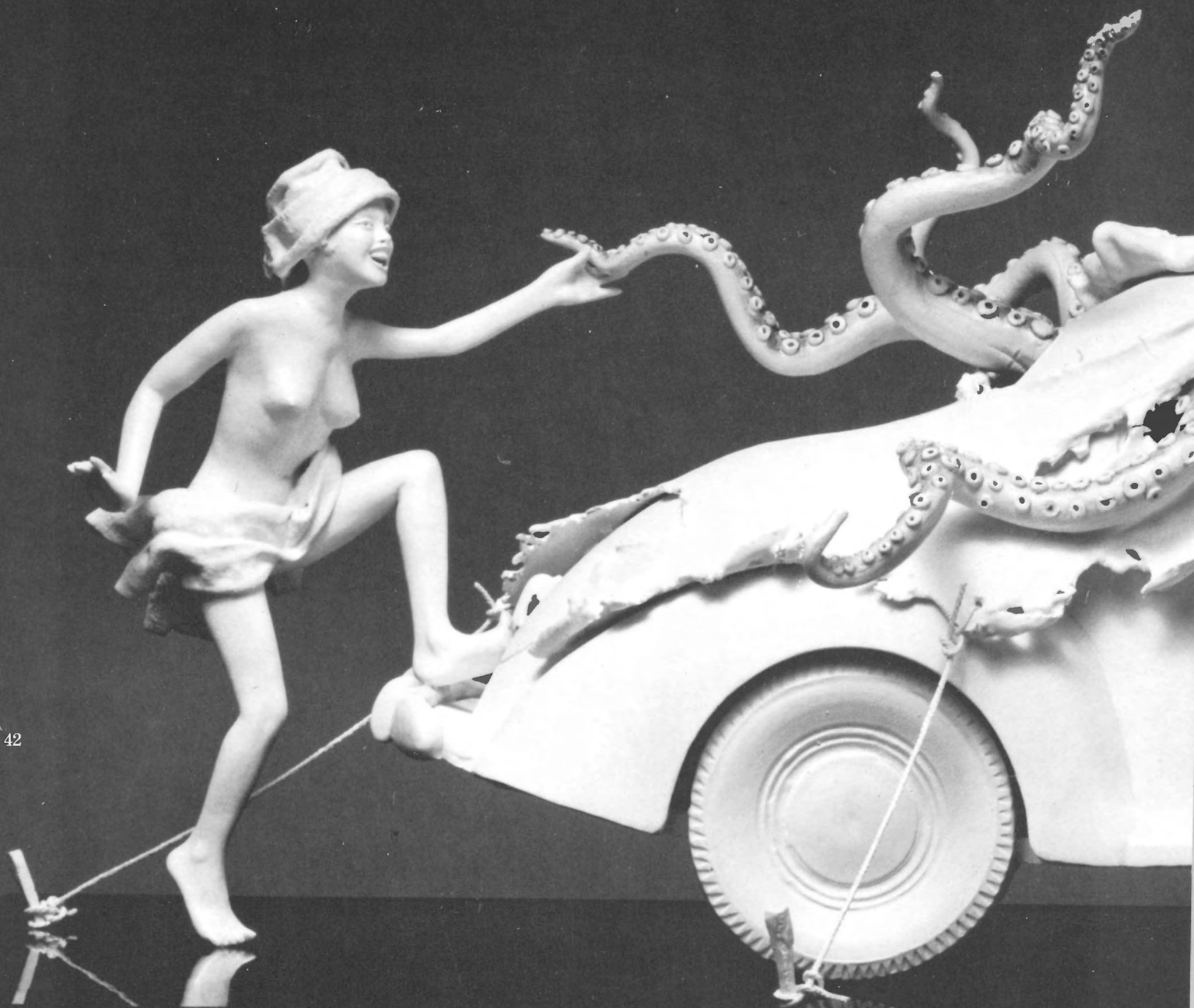
In light of the importance of this issue of identity, it is perplexing that in Warashina's recent pieces—in which naked humans journey through mazes—it is often impossible to discern whether the naked figures are in fact male or female. Perhaps the question of individual fate or circumstance is no longer meaningful in Warashina's eyes. Perhaps she now feels that all humans—men and women alike—are in the same predicament.

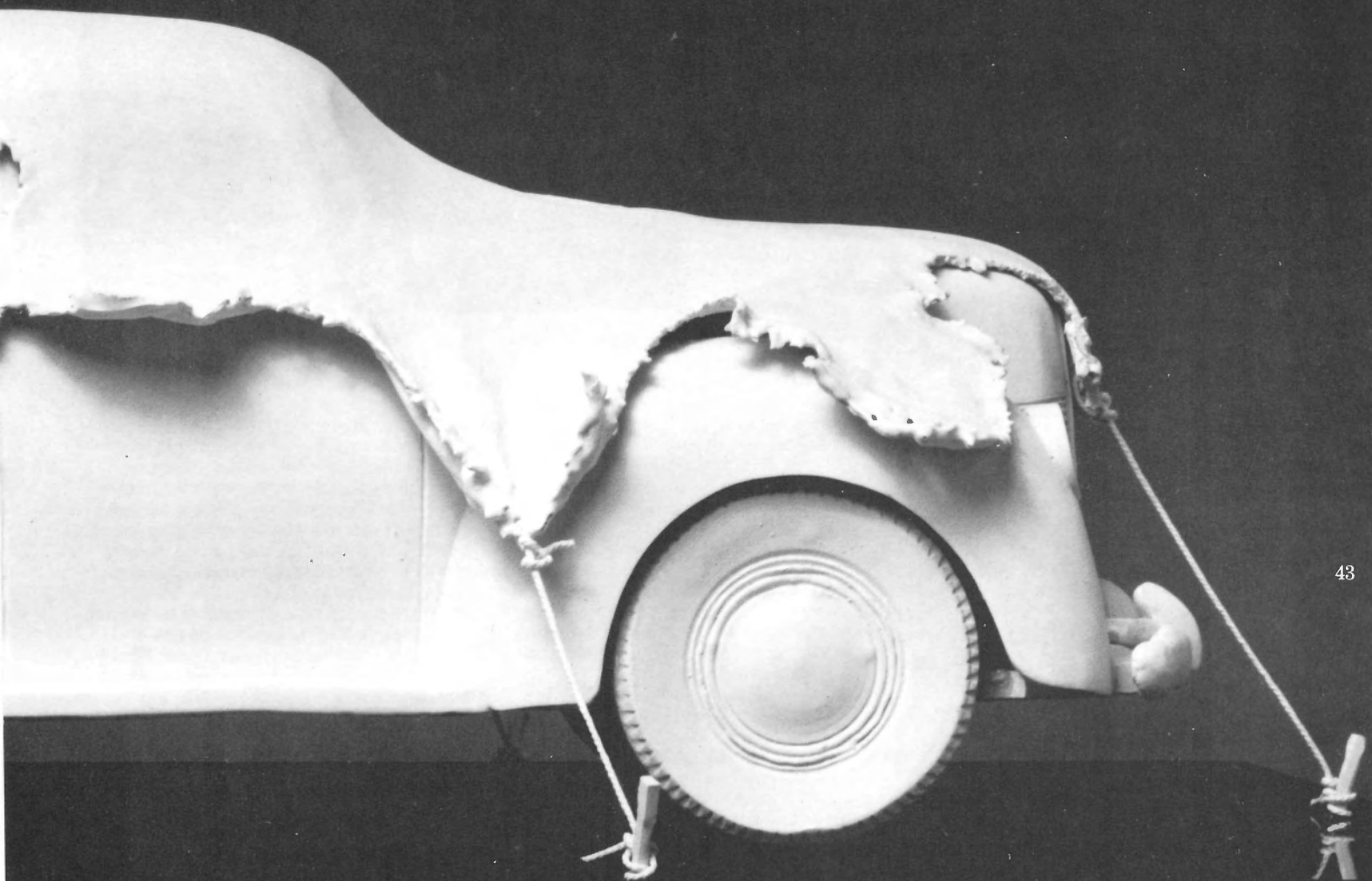
What is consistent throughout Warashina's career is her surrealist viewpoint. From her early days as a clay artist, she utilized a stream-of-consciousness approach. "At eight, after the kids were in bed, I would get started... just let it happen. It was really freeing—painting automatic paintings straight from the unconscious." These paintings then became the basis for her ceramic work. "I'm not sure where my ideas come from. I sit down or am driving and they hit, usually late at night. I just start thinking and all these images begin to come to my head?"

She records every idea that her unconscious gives her, then selects and occasionally alters the material as she works toward the sculptures. In the original drawing for *You Have Captured My Heart* (1976), for example, a nice, polite, Japanese lady sports a gun with a dripping heart stuck to the end of it, tucked into her obi. In the finished altar piece, however, the Japanese lady holds out a heart that has been pierced by arrows. Warashina felt that the lady with the gun was too clearly the aggressor, while the lady with the pierced heart could be either the huntress with her trophy, or the victim presenting her own heart. The arrows seemed less blatantly violent than a gun, and also had connotations of Cupid. For Warashina, Surrealism is more than a process. "I want my work to be dreamlike. I want to deal with reality, but take it back and forth between a real and a dreamlike state." As in a dream, there appears to be no logical organization for her juxtaposition of objects; yet Warashina insists that even though her imagery "may or may not make sense to anybody else, it has to make sense to me. I don't want a juxtaposition of anything with anything else. Back in the sixties, Richard Shaw and Robert Hudson made a series of pieces in which they threw together sticks, ducks—anything at random. I don't do that. I feel more akin to Magritte. Look at his selection of objects—the grouping doesn't make sense in a rational way, but it does in terms of feeling." Another trait that contributes to a dreamlike atmosphere is a sense of ambiguity. Although the images are perfectly well formed and clear, the



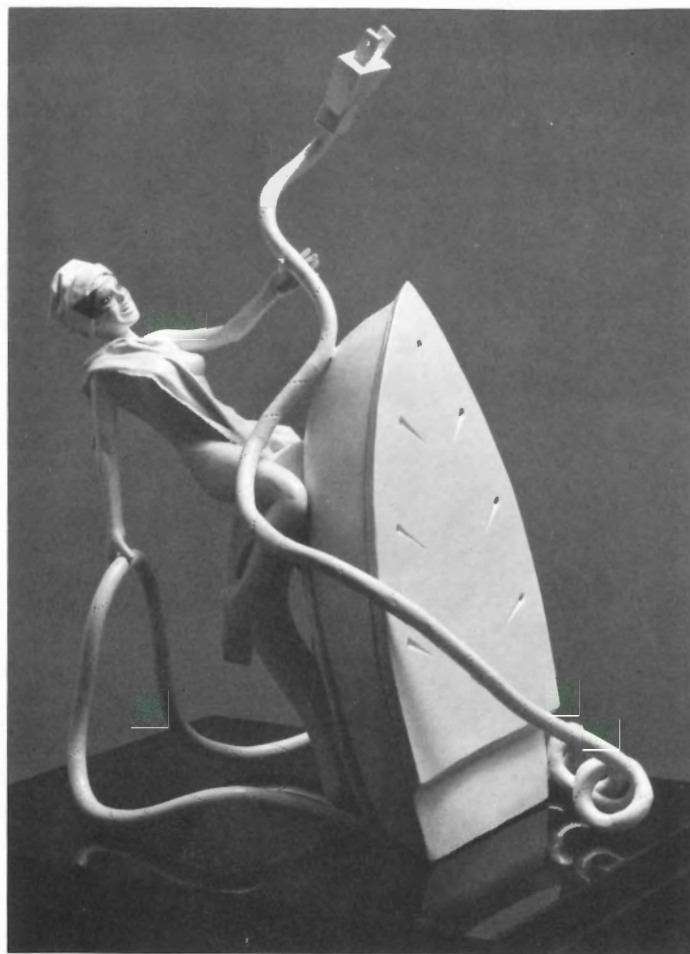
Octopus Car (1979), 21" x 41" x 20" (53 x 103 x 50 cm), lowfire clay, satin matte glaze, Plexiglas. Collection Allan Chasanoff, New York. Photo: Roger Schreiber.





Branding Iron (1978), 21½" x 16" x 14"
(54 x 40 x 35 cm), lowfire clay, satin
matte glaze. Photo: Roger Schreiber.

Flying Shrouds (1979), 23" x 43" x 25"
(58 x 108 x 63 cm), lowfire clay, satin
matte glaze, Plexiglas. Collection of the
artist. Photo: Roger Schreiber.



meaning remains open to several interpretations. "In the earlier Altar pieces, if you look at the figure straight on, she's laughing, but if you look from the side, she looks insane. I like that duality: I want that ambiguity in my work. Then, in my new pieces, by having the same expression on all the faces, the viewer is thrown a curve—he can get multiple meanings out of those smiles." Humor also removes Warashina's narratives from everyday reality, softening her statements of anger, sorrow, horror, disgust, or joy. For it is extremely important to Warashina, as it is to many contemporary artists, that her meaning be ambiguous enough that the viewer is required to participate in order to complete the piece.

There are other facets to Warashina's surrealism in addition to apparent illogic and ambiguity. She is a master at playfully mixing and exchanging the real (or at least the plausible) and the unreal. Although some implausible element almost always forms the core of the piece, Warashina will make painstaking efforts to ensure that other parts of the scenario are as believable as possible: wings strapped to humans have to appear as if they could fly; the underground tunnels through which people crawl are realistically portrayed. This is one of the reasons why Warashina's work is so striking: if the artwork were all imaginary, it could be easily dismissed as one person's fantasy. Instead, the image seems to oscillate between real and unreal, suggesting fanciful possibilities to the viewer that can range from the intriguing to the unnerving.

But what is fact and what is imagined, what is real and what is surreal, says Warashina, is not so easy to distinguish. Perhaps growing up American in a predominantly Japanese community in Spokane, where two cultures lived side by side, contributed to this outlook. Her grandmother, for example, had come to this country from Buddhist Japan and converted to Christianity. "When I was in the third grade, I remember going to her house and opening a cupboard, and there was a Buddhist shrine. It was like a little dollhouse with all these little things—hair and beads and pieces of paper. For me to look at that as a Christian kid growing up was like looking at the occult."³

Warashina is neither overwhelmed by the surreal character of life today, nor does she care to explain away the world's eccentricities—dispelling them by some rigidly imposed order or censorship. Rather, she incorporates them right into her work. Her art is like a magic rite through which she takes control of elements over which, in the real world, she has no control. By craft and cunning, Warashina selects material that is irrational, chaotic, or painful in the real world and welcomes it, like an invited guest, to be part of a little cosmos she has created on her own terms.

Upon exploration of this cosmos, we divine that the line between living and dead, between animate and inanimate, is extraordinarily flexible. Warashina delights in conjuring unnatural metamorphoses: a car may turn into wood, a kiln, or even an insect; the corpse surrounded by roses at the cemetery in *They Thought It Was My*

Last Trip! winks at us.

But it is in the White Figure series and more recent work that this theme of transformation is most varied and developed. There are the Muybridge-like pieces that depict a series of images representing one person's movement or transformation in consecutive time frames, or there is *Mrs. Peabody* (1980), a woman composed of a row of peas, emerging out of a pod. In *Born to Be* (1980), a bee woman complete with antennae and strapped-on wings hatches out of a chrysalis. Then, there are partial transformations as women don wings or bird masks that do not completely conceal or change them. These devices seem like symbolic expressions, hinting of a shamanistic element.

The theme of transformation in the form of creativity is also present on an unconscious, symbolic level. Looking through Warashina's work, we find that a sigmoid or curvilinear S-shape appears repeatedly, sometimes manifesting as waves, sometimes as flames or oddly shaped trees, or even the cord on an iron or an octopus tentacle. When we consult a compendium of various systems of symbolism, such as J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*, we read that this form has, among its associations, a connection with the source of the "continuing process of creation and preservation of the universe."⁴ The spiral and serpent, both closely related to the sigmoid form, also appear quite often in Warashina's work. There are even spirals in the arrangement of rose petals in *They Thought It Was My Last Trip!* In a large untitled altar of 1973, the central object of veneration is an egg surrounded by, among



other things, steps leading up to a border of tree spirals. These alternately coil to the left and to the right. Consulting Cirlot, we read that often the spiral symbolizes "the evolution of the universe."⁵ He further explains that spirals moving in a clockwise direction may indicate creative forces, while those moving in a counter clockwise direction may indicate destructive forces.⁶ Elsewhere, he writes of the many instances in which the egg symbolizes, as one could guess, immortality.⁷ One possible interpretation of this altar, then, is as an image of immortality lasting beyond cycles of creation and destruction. Is Warashina unconsciously referring to her own cycles of creativity; to cycles in her personal life; to life on this planet, or the to life of the universe itself? Or might this piece unconsciously refer to cycles in the viewer's life?

The 1973 Untitled Altar spiral reappears in *Flying Shrouds*, decorated with an identical mottled pattern. This time it forms a shepherd's crook. But it is in the two serpent maze bas-reliefs of 1984, *Earthworm* and *End of the Road*, that this theme is fully stated.

These two pieces, created in close sequence, are in several ways the reverse of each other. *Earthworm* is a spiral serpent form hollowed out of the earth, with its head at the outer edge. People move through its form, slowly transforming into larvae, then, at the center, an egg. In *End of the Road*, the serpent is convex with its head at the center while people and eggs move between its coils. Here we again have the theme of immortality, lasting beyond those mini-

and macro-cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, but this time the format is of a spiral centered within a square—a special form of mandala. This is an ancient symbol of reconciliation, of wholeness, and brings diversity, even chaos, into order.⁸ There is movement implied in *Earthworm*—both an evolution from center egg through larval forms to the outermost whole person, about to be born through the serpent's mouth; and a contrary movement, as if the serpent had just swallowed the person and is in the process of transforming her into an immortal egg.

In most of Warashina's work, transformations are playfully depicted. But in these two serpent mazes the theme becomes, if anything, majestic as people within the serpents transform into or out of the Immortal Egg. Here Warashina has unconsciously tapped into a symbolism found in many cultures, in many times. And by placing the serpents so they encircle the center, Warashina points not just to the middle, but to that mythical, sacred center of the world,⁹ the place of transformation, of both origin and return.

1. The artist's statements in this article, unless otherwise indicated, are from a series of interviews and conversations with Patti Warashina that took place over the summer of 1984 and into the following winter.

2. For an excellent summary of Warashina's work and influences, see LaMar Harrington, *Ceramics in the Pacific Northwest: A History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979) pp. 68–81.

3. As found in Susan Wechsler, *Low Fire Ceramics: A New Direction in American Clay* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1981), p. 125.

4. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, 2nd ed., (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), p. 189.

5. Ibid., p. 305.

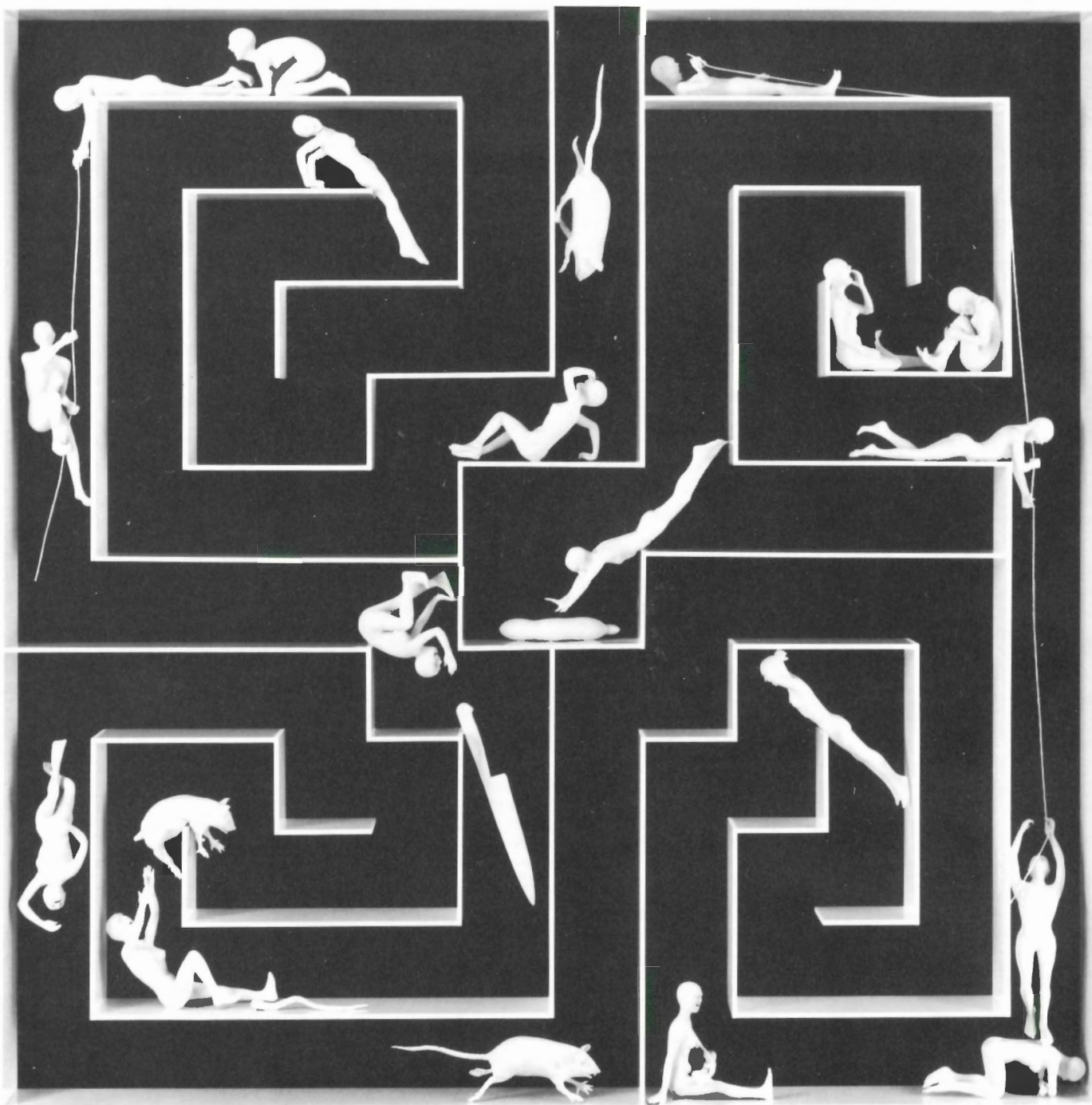
6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., p. 94. For another dimension of the serpent-egg theme, see Joseph Campbell: *The Way of The Animal Powers: Volume 1: Historical Atlas of World Mythology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 212.

8. Cirlot, *Dictionary*, pp. 201–202. Carl Jung has also written extensively about mandalas, including *Mandala Symbolism*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).

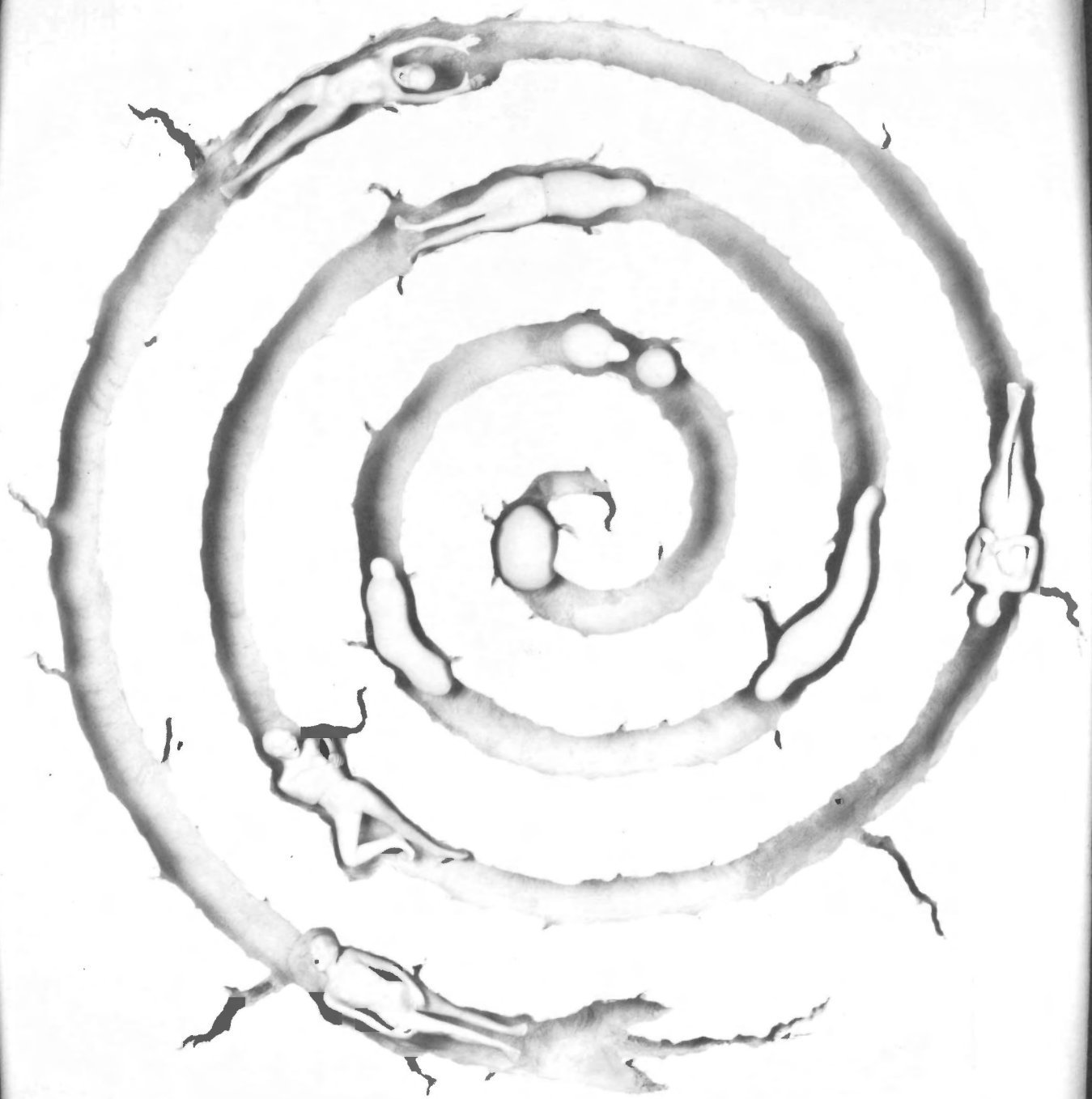
9. Philip Rawson: "Vessel as Center" *American Ceramics*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 30–31.

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Amazed (1983), 58" x 56" x 6" (145 x 140 x 15 cm), porcelain, mixed media. Collection of the artist. Photo: Roger Schreiber.

Earthworm (1984), 50" x 46" x 6" (125 x 115 x 15 cm), porcelain, mixed media. Collection of the artist. Photo: Roger Schreiber.



© 1984 The Museum



Frans Wildenhain

Deborah Norton

Daphne I (1970), 20³/₄" x 13¹/₄" x 18" (51 x 34 x 45 cm), stoneware, glaze. Collection R. B. Johnson. Photo: David Henry.

When you are laughing, think only about laughing. When you are making pots, think only about making pots.¹

The above advice, which Frans Wildenhain often passed on to his students, is indicative of the intensity and energy with which this potter lived and worked. But no single quote can sum up this complex man, whose ceramics spanned fifty years and ranged from refined, functional pots to sculptural, nonfunctional vessels to large murals. Fortunately, he kept voluminous diaries and sketch books, which were found after his death in January 1980, that intimately record his thoughts, his sources of inspiration, and his daily life. Surprisingly, there are few references to contemporary ceramists in Wildenhain's diaries. His friends and former students report that he never discussed the work of his peers and he deplored the trendiness of the American clay movement. At a time when American ceramics were polarized between the Alfred aesthetic and the West Coast avant-garde, Wildenhain adhered to neither tradition. Instead, he chose a way of expressing himself that was highly personal and uniquely his own. It is thus difficult today to assess his place within the context of the American movement. Directors of craft museums, ceramic historians, and leading ceramists have found his work difficult to classify and, consequently, it is frequently ignored.² Part of the problem lies in the fact that Wildenhain never considered himself a craftsman working in clay, but rather an artist with a special affinity for this medium. He developed this attitude while studying at the Bauhaus in Weimar, Germany.

Born in Leipzig in 1905, Wildenhain always knew he wanted to be an artist, but his family's poverty placed seemingly insurmountable obstacles before him. Hoping to find a compromise between her son's artistic leanings and his need to earn a living, Wildenhain's mother convinced him to apprentice himself to a lithographer of architectural renderings at the age of fourteen. An expert craftsman, Wildenhain quickly became a journeyman, but his artistic ambitions did not subside. Finally, he found the opportunity for expression at a lecture by Walter Gropius, who was touring the country to promote his newly-founded Bauhaus school. In 1924, a scholarship enabled Wildenhain to attend.

Although he was at the Bauhaus briefly (1924–25) "it had lasting impact upon my life,"³ he recalled years later. He eventually abandoned the stylistic traits he acquired there, but he never abandoned the ideas, which recur throughout his lifetime and in numerous diary entries, where he continued to rehash his ideas. "It was somehow too much at once," he wrote at the age of 72, "I am a slow learner. The seed fell and since this time it has grown. The result is me—still struggling."

The precepts of the Bauhaus were stated in its Founding Manifesto, which sought to break down the barrier between fine art and craft. "The artist is the craftsman in his highest form,"⁴ it declared.

Students began their studies with a six-month preliminary course that introduced them to proportion and scale, rhythm, light, shade, and color. "Form," rather than painting, sculpture, ceramics, or woodworking, was the subject of instruction. The beginner, exposed to all materials and tools, was then able to find where he could best use his innate talents. Upon completion, each student entered a workshop of his own choice where he studied under two masters—one of form and one of craft. Teachers were Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee, but the last of these seems to have had the strongest influence on him. "The cosmic laws through the philosopher/painter Klee are coming always back again and again," he wrote in 1976. Klee's closeness to nature—his ability to translate the unconscious experiences of nature into visual images—is paralleled in Wildenhain's finest work. In another diary entry, Wildenhain restated Klee's teachings about bridging the gap between the unconscious and reality:

*Imagination and reality
precondition or element "to create"
Paul Klee picking grass blade with the roots
studying the structure of growing.
The detail of nature is significant.
You see it, you understand it. You can draw it.*

Wildenhain had entered the Bauhaus with the intention of becoming a painter, and was very impressed by Klee, but when it came time for him to choose a workshop to enter, he chose pottery.

*I felt always I am a painter or at least I would like to become one,
but my economical situation asked for a more practical solution to
make somehow a living... the inflation, no job—political upheaval*

—caused by treaty of Versailles. As a potter I could still pursue painting.

Everyone has an affinity to some material. Why that is so, god knows—mine is clay and soil earth.

The main force behind this decision, however, was sculptor Gerhard Marcks, Master of Form at the pottery workshop, with whom Wildenhain maintained a life-long friendship.

Gerhard Marcks was my guru.

Also for others.

A man that one had to love

If you couldn't love him you had to let him go by

The fluidity of his soul you were taking in

A teacher in the real sense of the word

A real humanist

and sometimes he didn't listen in one ear.

Marcks's compact figures were indebted to ancient Greek models as well as to the simplified planes of Cubism. Some of Wildenhain's work had the same sources of inspiration. Lyonel Feininger once wrote in a letter to Marcks, "You are a form-giver far beyond the mere representation of nature, translating nature instead into its pure essentials in order to reveal its deep character."⁵ These words apply equally to Wildenhain. In his work at the pottery, Marcks sought to achieve a more compact abstract form by exploring ceramic bowls and vases.⁶ Later Wildenhain was to tell his students, "A pot is the most abstract of forms."⁷

At the Bauhaus, Wildenhain developed an approach to work that he never abandoned. He consciously studied the work of other artists, exploring their ideas and innovations in his own pieces, in an effort to discover for himself exactly what they were doing. He never slavishly copied another's art, but if he could adapt a concept and make it uniquely his own, he would.

Although Marcks believed strongly in uniting craft with art, he was unsympathetic to the school's gradual shift toward the union of art and technology. When political forces caused the school to move to Dessau in 1925, Marcks took a position as director of the State School of Fine and Applied Arts at Halle-Saale. Wildenhain and Marguerite Friedlander, a Bauhaus alumna recruited by Marcks to establish a pottery, followed him. Wildenhain continued his studies and passed his Master of Craft exam in 1929. The following year, Frans and Marguerite were married. In 1933, the Wildenhains resettled in Holland to escape the difficulties that Hitler's rise to power had created for Marguerite, who was Jewish. There they established a production pottery. Being a French citizen, Marguerite managed to obtain a visa in 1940, which allowed her to enter the United States. But Frans was unable to join her until 1947.⁸

At the age of forty-two, Wildenhain was finally reunited with Marguerite at her newly-founded Pond Farm pottery in California. Inspired by the California landscape, he resumed his ceramics, making functional pots and some small sculptures, and he continued to paint and draw as he did throughout his life.

1947 I came to California

Was a dream place

In this time my drawings

slowly moving away from the representational.

Out, inside of the landscape,

in this part

everything was revelation of the splendor of nature.

Plants, stones, birds, the coastline, rocks.

World you are so wonderful, too much.

Some sculpture came out of the star gazer.⁹

His functional vases and bowls, done in the style he had perfected in Europe, emphasized surface design as well as form. He decorated these pots with scenes of country life, geometric designs, and even a poem in an effort to make them more personal. As he explained: "The temptation to treat the surface of the 'naked' pot with lines, texture and glazes—the blending of one into another was an early challenge—to give an additional message beyond the impersonal."¹⁰

In 1950, Harold Brennan, the director of the School for American Craftsmen, invited both the Wildenhains to teach at the school's new home at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Marguerite chose to stay at Pond Farm, but Frans accepted the offer. Once firmly ensconced at RIT (where he would remain for the next twenty-five years), and no longer plagued by the uncertainties of



Near the Pond (1950–1960), 42" x 18 1/4" (105 x 47 cm), stoneware, polychrome glazes, engobe. Collection Dr. and Mrs. Michael Watson. Photo: David Henry.

Classic Urn (1952), 19" x 8 1/2" x 12" (48 x 22 x 30 cm), stoneware. Collection Lili Wildenhain. Photo: David Henry.

war and the upheaval of relocation, Wildenhain's ceramics flourished. He continued his investigation of form, his study of nature, and his search for a more personal means of expression. During his early years in Rochester, he worked simultaneously in three different directions, making functional pots, figurative sculptures, and nonfunctional vessels.

Spurred on by a need to augment his meager teaching salary, Wildenhain made functional pots throughout his life. His wares of the early fifties, which tended to balance or center their mass about the pot's middle and looked to classical Greek forms for inspiration, were clearly indebted to the Bauhaus. His *Classical Urn* (1952), for example, which takes its form from a Greek trophy cup, has been given a human quality by the akimbo arrangement of its handles, which grow out of the pot like arms out of a body. Wildenhain attributed this anthropomorphizing of form to the influence of Marcks, who he said "taught me the human figure is always in the foreground"

This unglazed vessel, devoid of surface decoration and thus totally dependent on form for self-expression, emphasizes Wildenhain's powerful handling of the clay.

*There was a time I couldn't stand sight and feeling of bisque. I changed... [a vessel without a glaze] is like a body before clothes are put on. Pure—like Mexican, greek pottery. Perhaps this nakedness makes it appear fragile, tender, unassuming.*¹¹

At the same time, he was modeling figurative sculptures inspired by the use of negative and positive space by such modernists as Henry Moore and Alexander Archipenko—in Moore's use of mass and volume and in Archipenko's innovation of using a hole as a means of relating the planes on opposite sides of a sculpture. Wildenhain soon abandoned the idea of making objects out of solid pieces of clay, but he adapted some of their other concepts for his own use.

Simultaneously, he began exploring the creation of nonfunctional vessels. The concept of the unity of art and craft, which was central to Wildenhain's Bauhaus training, was unknown in America at this time. Thus, it was not as great a leap for Wildenhain, as it was for his American counterparts, to go from functional to nonfunctional vessels. "Making a vase is a transcending process towards the frontier of sculpture. The function becomes less important—there is no dividing wall. It is simultaneous unfolding."¹²

Isabel Herdle, former associate director of the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, recalls a visit to Wildenhain's studio in the mid-fifties: "I remember seeing beautiful, nonfunctional forms. They meant a great deal to him. But he took them up as a side issue as though he wasn't really sure what he was aiming toward."¹³ When he saw Peter Voulkos's nonfunctional work, he was pleased to find that somebody else was thinking the same way.¹⁴ From this point on, he devoted his greatest energy to nonfunctional work.

In 1952, realizing that few outlets existed to sell his work, Wildenhain joined with metalsmiths Ronald Pearson and Jack Prip and woodworker Tage Frid in founding Shop 1, a craft gallery, in Rochester. Although the gallery never provided Wildenhain with a substantial income, it did expose his work to many people. One of them, Robert Bradley Johnson of Rochester, was quick to perceive the strength and depth in Wildenhain's work. Over a period of twenty years, Johnson amassed a collection of over three hundred of his vessels.

Ironically, although Wildenhain was constantly complaining about his need for income, he was not pleased by Johnson's purchases at first. "I don't think he liked the environment the pots were coming into," Johnson said, referring to his refined home. "I think he pictured his pots in more of a rustic setting, like his own home." But eventually, Wildenhain realized his good fortune in Johnson's decision to collect his work. Wildenhain was well aware that, because he worked in diverse styles, it was important that a large body of work be kept together so that the full range of his artistic statement could be seen and understood. He also realized that Johnson was one of the few people who truly appreciated his work: "Only Robert Johnson... I see in the gleam of his eyes when I have done it again"

From his early Bauhaus days, Wildenhain maintained his overwhelming concern with form. As he explained: "The first consideration is form, and I approach it as a kind of abstract sculpture—to feel and interpret the shape simply as a shape, and not as a description or reminiscence."¹⁵

Wildenhain was also concerned with the material itself. While other ceramists were striving for technical perfection, Wildenhain was handling the clay in a loose and free manner that fully exploited its plasticity. To him, fingerprints, scratch marks, and cracks were not

imperfections to be eradicated, but personally expressive marks inherent to the process of working. He frequently exhorted his students to make sure the clay looked like clay.

A third important concern was with natural forms. In 1955, divorced from Marguerite, he married jeweler Marjorie McIlroy and moved to a rustic setting in Bushnell's Basin, surrounded by a pond, woods, and wildlife. Here he had ample opportunity to study nature intimately. His interest was not in broad landscapes, but in the details of a particular bird, leaf, or mushroom. Wildenhain expressed his passion for nature in his ceramics not by reproducing it, but by capturing its essence. Sounding very much like Klee's disciple, he explained: "Nature reveals to me the real and the abstract. The one doesn't exist without the other. The emerging result is an object expressing what is going on in my mind."¹⁶ Wildenhain's respect for nature linked his life with his art. Isabel Herdle remembers finding a beautiful, withered leaf on her desk at the Memorial Art Gallery one morning, a sure sign that Wildenhain had been there. Over a decade later, the year before he died, Wildenhain recaptured the essence of this leaf in a raku-fired sculpture that serves as a metaphor for nature and the life cycle. Imbued with mass and volume, this form speaks of the last surge of vitality in a living being. The edges of the leaf curl inward, as if protecting the core that contains its center. At the same time, this curling-in of the edges produces a vessel form.

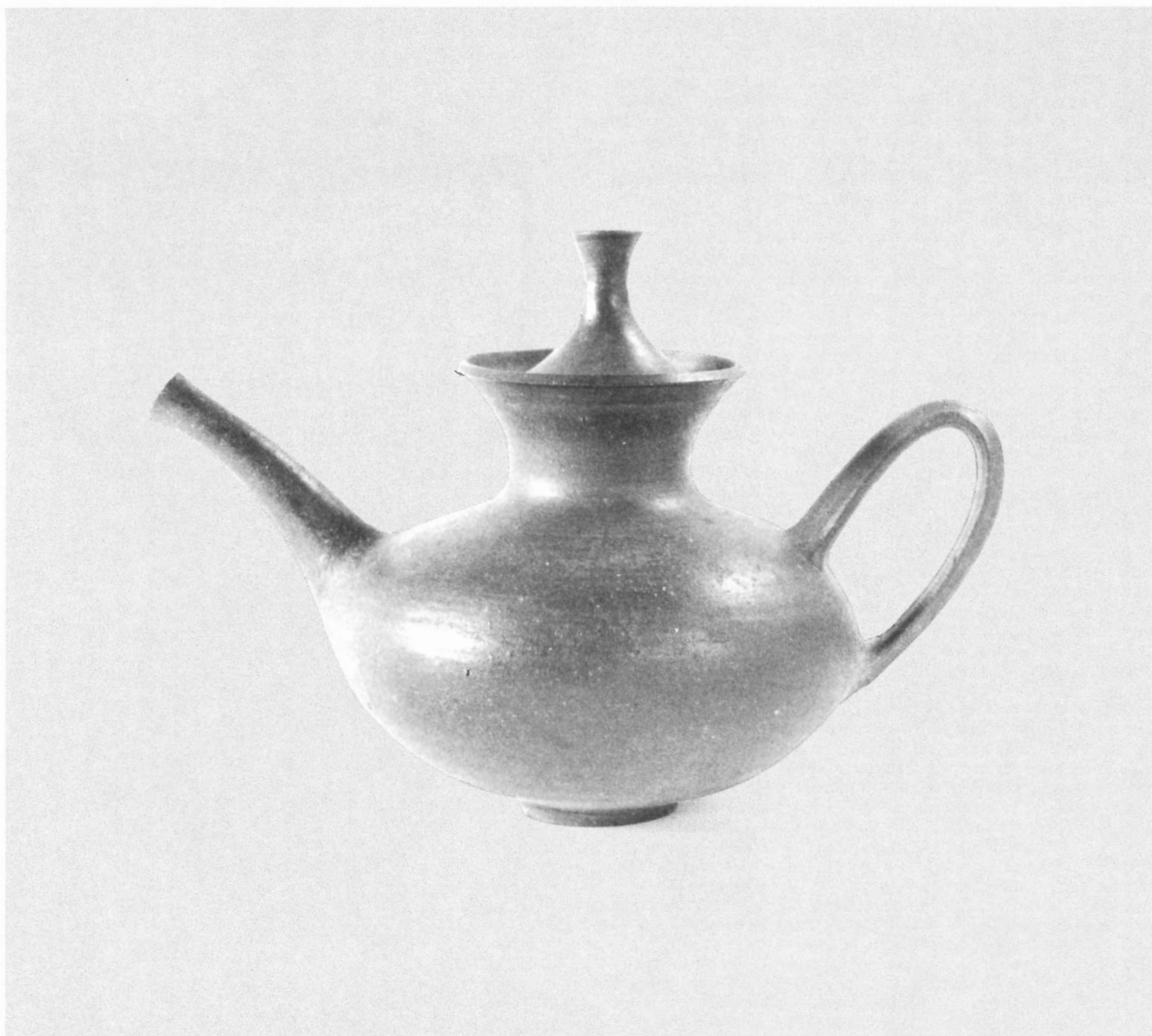
Apart from his foray into solid sculptural figures in the fifties, Wildenhain adhered to the vessel format no matter how sculptural his work became. For example, in 1970 he embarked on an academic study of the relationship of geometrical forms. Other artists might resolve the visual problems of arranging a cube, sphere, and cylinder by creating an abstract sculpture. But Wildenhain's solution was to place the cylinder on the sphere to create a vase. He then used the cube as a base on which to balance the form. It is interesting to note that even in this precise, formalist study, he did not bother to conceal a crack in the base. As in all his work, he was not consciously seeking to create a masterpiece, but to explore a concept.

In 1956, Wildenhain was commissioned by Strassenburgh Laboratories (now Pennwalt Corporation) to create a large mural over one hundred feet long for its new headquarters in Rochester. Although ceramic murals were almost unknown in America, they were a well-established tradition in Europe. In fact, Gerhard Marcks had done ceramic murals for Walter Gropius's buildings. In the Strassenburgh mural, Wildenhain illustrated the history of drugs, beginning with plants, the original source of medicines, and ending with laboratory equipment and synthetic pills. Many of the stylistic traits he had developed in his vessels and figures are present. The clay is handled in his characteristically rough manner. He anthropomorphized the lab equipment, turning handles into arms and funnels into heads. These floating, cutout forms have a sense of whimsy, enlivened by rhythmic lines—traits reminiscent of Klee. There are elements of Cubism, Miró-esque shapes and surprisingly robust colors. This last is perhaps a tribute to Kandinsky. He employed Archipenko's hole, allowing the wall to show through at unexpected places. However, he left large empty spaces between the forms, relying, somewhat unsuccessfully, on the strength of the narrative, not the integration of the shapes, to unite the mural.

By the 1960s, ceramic murals had come into vogue and Wildenhain was commissioned to do two more. The first was a massive six-foot-high frieze that lined the four walls of the catalogue room at the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland. Here his biomorphic shapes, derived from studies of nature, are once again cutouts, but this time the well-integrated forms are placed close together and appear to be almost intertwined. For the Overlook Hospital in Summit, New Jersey, he made a small mural which drew its theme from medical history.

His final mural, completed in 1972, was for the cavelike entrance to the student union auditorium at RIT. He titled it *Allegory of a Landscape* but later remarked that "everyone sees or reads within it what he likes to see according to the power of his imagination or insight." Of the four, this mural is least bound to the idea of tiles and is more a wall sculpture than a mosaic. It can be viewed as an aerial landscape showing the plowed fields and lakes of upstate New York. But the raised contours, forming geometric, faceted planes, can also be seen as an investigation of Cubism. Cubistic traits appeared in Wildenhain's earlier work and he continued to explore Cubism in the RIT mural. His use of unglazed clay, which emphasizes subtleties of form, is similar to the monochromatic color scheme of early twentieth-century Cubist painters. This movement had fascinated Marcks as well as Klee. It is not surprising that





Teapot (ca. 1951), 6" (15 cm) high,
stoneware. Photo: David Henry.

Vase (1978), 17½" x 5" (44 x 13 cm),
stoneware, glaze. Collection R. B. Johnson.
Photo: David Henry.





Bird (1960), 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (34 cm) high, stoneware, glaze. Collection Lili Wildenhain. Photo: David Henry.

Vase (1948), 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 5 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (19 x 15 cm), stoneware, glazed with paper resist and mishima. Collection Lili Wildenhain. Photo: David Henry.



Wildenhain should decide to return to Cubism almost half a century after his introduction to it at the Bauhaus.

At the same time Wildenhain was producing this vast quantity of work, he was also teaching. His pedagogical method was based on the Bauhaus tenet that art cannot be taught, but merely released and directed through contact with a creative personality.¹⁷ While others taught techniques, Wildenhain taught how to live and think as an artist. His students recall that he never tried to push them in one direction, but instead helped them to develop their individual aesthetic sense.

However, not all students were equally inspired by his teaching. His brutal honesty and male chauvinist tactics discouraged many less-stalwart pupils, just as it alienated acquaintances and colleagues. Female students who were not working up to par were advised to become belly dancers or Kodak secretaries.¹⁸ Classroom sessions, for those who stayed with him, never consisted of lectures on form or color. Instead Wildenhain discussed life, nature, and everyday occurrences and related his observations to ceramics. For instance, when teaching students to make a teapot, he would discuss tea leaves, coffee beans, and how tea is prepared rather than technical considerations of form. He had an ability to transmit to students his limitless energy and his love of clay. Although Wildenhain had little formal education, he read widely and voraciously. At the Bauhaus, his teachers had included discussions of Greek dramas and Goethe in their art classes and his diaries are filled with quotes from such diverse authors as Hannah Arendt, Lao-tsu, Shakespeare, and Goethe. In a letter to Marcks (June 1978) he explained: "In poems I find more what's happening in the world than in newspapers." Thus when Wildenhain approached a new piece, he had a rich intellectual background from which to draw. He did not arrive at forms through accident, but through an intellectual process. His ceramics are never pedantic exercises, but the depth of his knowledge, tempered by a careful observation of nature, is apparent.

Through travel, Wildenhain sought to increase his artistic vocabulary by adding images and forms from other cultures. He was especially intrigued by more primitive, abstract art such as Romanesque painting and sculpture, the Lascaux caves, and pre-Columbian pottery. He was fascinated by primitive ceramists' ability to make handbuilt functional vessels in a highly sculptural manner, and to infuse their designs with spiritual meaning. It's likely that his bird sculpture of 1960 was inspired by a trip to Mexico two years earlier. This barely functional vessel is reminiscent of pre-Columbian stirrup jars, those Indian "canteens" frequently shaped as animals. However, it also contains many Bauhaus traits: from Klee, the childlike wonder at observing a bird; from Kandinsky, the abstraction of the bird form; and from Marcks, the anthropomorphizing of the form into a human head resting on a neck and shoulders. In addition, Wildenhain employs this motif as a means to study balancing forms, a theme he returns to again and again. As he said: "I don't understand myself in a chronological development. Often I return to old forms for a new start or modification."¹⁹ Like so much of Wildenhain's work, this piece can be viewed simultaneously as a whimsical fantasy, a personal statement about nature, and a serious exploration of form.

A trip to Japan in 1969, two years after the death of his wife Marjorie, also had a profound effect on his work. While there, he stayed for a month in a Zen monastery where he studied ink painting with a sumi master. Although he visited Japanese potteries, he had no potting facilities, so he devoted himself to painting and sketching, frequently limiting his palette to black ink. Following this trip, and his marriage to weaver Elizabeth (Lili) Rankin, a student of Zen, Wildenhain's ceramic forms became cleaner, less complicated. His Japanese experience helped him to resolve some of the problems with color that had previously plagued him.

His work became larger in scale, too. The vessels in his three-piece *Encounter* series (1976–77) are over three feet tall. With their black and white glaze, resembling a simplified landscape, and their tall, narrow shape, they seem closer to sumi scroll painting than to Japanese ceramics. Once again, he has anthropomorphized these forms, but rather than creating a soft, rounded figure as he had done in the past, he has made these vessels straight-sided and filled with tension. Unlike his earlier work, he does not balance the separate elements, but firmly stacks them. The top pieces are no longer heads, but more like menacing helmets.

In *Daphne III and IV* (1978–79), he continued to explore the same concepts. This time, however, he added "handles" or "arms" that seem to grow out of the body, harking back to his early Bauhaus pots. These arms, positioned in a dancer's gesture, give movement

to eerily headless forms. Like his early functional pots, these seem to be inspired by ancient Greek art, but this time from the Cycladic rather than the Classical period.

Toward the end of his life, Wildenhain was aware that he had not received the recognition he felt he deserved. Although he had been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1958 and was made a Fellow in the Collegium of Craftsmen of the American Crafts Council in 1975, his name was rarely mentioned among those of America's most innovative ceramists. He must have realized that this was partly his own fault. He was a terrible publicist, unable to promote himself in the manner that America's Hollywood mentality required. And his ability to alienate people was legendary. While he could be a warm and generous friend, he could also be cruel, hostile, and argumentative and was capable of intimidating the tallest, most powerful personalities with whom he came in contact. Yet he accepted his lot philosophically. "Success is good for the ego, but failure does more for realization." He was content to remain in his studio, pursuing his love affair with clay... perhaps waiting for the phone to ring, for his work to be recognized, but having no regrets if this did not happen. What mattered to him was that he worked and lived in a way that measured up to his own high standards: "Man was made of 'dirt' too. He will return to it again. What counts is, what it means to you. Too poetic? A handful of clay. A handful of words. What's the difference?"²⁰

1. Barbara Cowles, editor, *Frans Remembered* (New York: Fishers, 1980), pages unnumbered.

2. According to Wildenhain's diary entry (3/75), this was the reason Paul Smith, director of the American Craft Museum, did not give Wildenhain a show. In conversations with Daniel Rhodes (10/29/84) and Rick Hirsch (10/30/84), the same point was made.

3. All quotes of Wildenhain are from his diaries, unless otherwise indicated.

4. Geraldine Weiss and John David Farmer, *Concepts of The Bauhaus* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University, The Busch-Reisinger Museum Collection, 1971), p. 12.

5. Barbara Einzig, Lynne Dean, and Andrea P. A. Belloli, editors, *German Expressionist Sculpture* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Museum of Art, 1983), p. 150.

6. Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1965), p. 236.

7. Barbara Cowles, "A Frans Wildenhain Collection," *American Craft*, April/May 1980, p. 85.

8. Elaine Levin, *Frans Wildenhain* (Rochester, New York: Memorial Art Gallery, 1984), p. 8–9.

9. Diary entry, 1976.

10. *Frans Wildenhain* (Rochester, New York: Rochester Institute of Technology, 1975), pages unnumbered.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Conversation with Isabel Herdle, 11/2/84.

14. Conversation with Barbara Cowles, 11/1/84.

15. Harold Brennan, "Three Rochester Craftsmen," *American Artist*, June 1958, p. 42.

16. *Frans Wildenhain*, RIT.

17. Marcel Franciscano, *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar* (Champagne-Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1971), p. 129.

18. *Frans Remembered*.

19. *Frans Wildenhain*, RIT.

20. Ibid.

In addition to the people already cited, information for this article was also derived from conversations with Lili Wildenhain (11/9/84), Alec Hazlett (11/2/84), and Candeger Furtun (9/25/84). The *Frans Wildenhain retrospective* organized last fall by the Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, published an illustrated, 48-page catalogue with an essay by Elaine Levin. It is available from the gallery at 490 University Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607. Deborah Norton has contributed to *Craft Range*, *Metalsmith*, *Fiberarts*, and *Surface Design Journal*.

Deborah Norton is a freelance writer and contributing editor to *Metalsmith*, currently living in London.

Exhibitions

Cat, Fish, Ladder, and a Blue Spruce in a Boat (1983), 30" x 17" x 23" (75 x 42.5 x 57.5 cm), lowfire clay.



Robert Cooke

Joan Marter

Robert Cooke's figurative sculptures range from the expressionistic and confrontational to the fantastic and allegorical. In the first category are his large heads, heroic in scale and vivid in color. Their surfaces are aggressively modeled and, when raised slightly above eye level on the high plinths the artist prefers, they assume a confrontational position. Cooke has dubbed these ceramic heads *Beasts* or *Monsters* because they are evocative of the passionate or bestial aspects of human nature. They can also be viewed as self-portraits—representing the artist's search for control, restraint, and a coherent direction in life.

Cooke's large heads have energetic, crusty surfaces that are enhanced by the lines cut into the soft clay before firing. The palette is varied but brilliant throughout, and intensifies the expressionistic fervor of these images. Small beady eyes are set off by vivid, contrasting hues from the surrounding "flesh." Facial expressions range from fear and anguish to pathos and humor.

Cooke recognizes the paradox inherent in these heads: while they suggest wanton energy, the beasts are actually "caught" at a still moment. He seeks to represent contained energy here, using the restraint inherent in the limitations of the clay to order the emotional content. Some of the forms appear menacing, but on closer inspection we discover their lightheartedness, as when the artist positions a flower at the center of a beast's forehead. From their vital, confrontational posturings he has captured a moment of repose. The raging beast is offered a chance for reflection, and the intimidating power of these images is temporarily arrested.

Cooke has related these spirited heads to his childhood recollections of Jean Cocteau's film, *Beauty and the Beast*, a marvelous fable that the artist admires for its poignant sense of isolation, alienation, and the humanization of the Beast through Beauty's love. "The artistic effort is really to control the beast," says Cooke, and his sculptures suggest a confrontation with self—with one's inner rage—that is calmed by art. Although these are self-images, they are not intended to describe the artist, but to encourage the viewer to confront himself with the stilled intensity of these images.

Cooke's works are fully in keeping with current expressionistic trends in both painting and sculpture. The active surface textures and painterly effects he achieves in his portrait heads call to mind earlier expressionists in America, such as George McNeil and Robert Beauchamp, as well as the younger generation of Neoexpressionists. The figurative fantasies of Jean Dubuffet also come to mind, but even the French artist's heads appear tame when compared to these monstrous subjects.

More magical than aggressive are Cooke's *Boats*—large clay vessels with oars bearing plant and animal life for a symbolic journey to a better world. Each boat measures over three feet in length and contains a naively rendered cat, fish, and tree, as well as a crudely constructed ladder. The artist has noted the traditional association of clay with the production of vessels for various purposes; thus it seems appropriate that the material should be used for these boats. The clay container holds "the contents of our world."

The forms of plant and animal life aboard these vessels are each of comparable scale, suggesting no hierarchy in importance. The fish and the cat cohabit peacefully as symbols of all sea and land creatures respectively. The ladder is the only manmade element present, which the artist designates a "symbolic tool for man," a suggestion of hope for a future society. With these allegorical ensembles, Cooke expresses the desire to break out of the known world, to establish a new order. A note of desperation is also implicit in his allegories, however, even as they resemble the

playful, childlike narratives of storybooks and nursery rhymes. Both the heroic heads and the boat ensembles—strongly gestural, individualistic, and intimate—bespeak a personal aesthetic that is deeply humanistic.

Robert Cooke's sculptures were most recently on view at Princeton Gallery of Fine Arts, New Jersey. This fall he will exhibit at Tomasulo Gallery, Union County College, Cranford, New Jersey, and at Eugenia Cucalone Gallery, New York.

Patrick Shia Crabb

Susan Zwinger

Stirrup Relic (1984), 13" x 9" x 20" (33 x 23 x 50 cm), low temperature salt-fired clay.

Patrick Shia Crabb throws simple, ancient shapes bearing glyphs and other mysterious symbols that evoke the power of first vessels, such as those originally derived from clay interiors of reed baskets. Huge loop handles, tripod stands, and gridded, fire-burned interiors anchor Crabb's forms solidly, if somewhat enigmatically, in functionalism. These fanciful, archaeological mysteries are thus grounded in a sense of reality, an inner necessity which many new experiments do not have.

Crabb employs wheel, handbuilt, and extruded forms, firing in many lowfire techniques: raku, sawdust, dung, salt, and sugar firings. The dusty, thickly encrusted underglazes simulate the found, moldy, rusted, and eroded patinas of ancient artworks, while highly stylized animals, symbols, bugs, houses move across these rich surfaces with the random spontaneity of petroglyphs overlapped on a cave wall.

Crabb's fertile imagination is constantly translating forms from antiquity. Just one of these ideas, transmuted through many forms, could serve as the basis for a lifelong career. His spherical bird container, with its separate beak-handle-head sitting precariously atop a delightfully ungainly body, is one of many examples. Two-fingered hands fold in front of the jar around a chiseled support that holds the long unattached trough beak. Two round worms of clay represent eyes in that wonderful manner in which a primitive translates his natural world into geometrical, therefore controllable, forms.

Crabb's huge, footed platters, such as *Lizard Plate*, are full of rifts, tears, and holes and make use of the natural crackle in clay and underglaze to create an entire universe. The jagged lizard with tail in mouth is an archetype for the cycle of life; at its center is an open, gridded form painted bright orange. Crude human dwellings hung with crosses float over this fiery territory, as if in some primitive cartographic code.

Crabb seems to create his own complete culture—down to every detail of language, art, architecture, and belief system—through his imaginary archaeological dig. When challenged as being yet another pseudo-primitive, Crabb claims to be a synthesis of many different sources, primitive and contemporary—including the modern-day parking lot marker. Crabb, Oriental by birth, disclaims the concept of preconscious racial memory, yet the recent discovery of the ancient Japanese Jomon period offers fresh material for speculation.

The strongest of his forms, *Hyrum Artifact*, consists of a large vessel propped on a four-inch tripod. In the bottom, there is yet another gridded hole, red with the suggestion of fire. In *Kiln Relic*, charred thigh bones lie randomly like the remains of an ancient dinner party. On a large jar that culminates in double pipes connected by a bridge or "handle," Crabb has placed a pregnant woman in the process of birthing, while spirals, holes, and glyphs float about in her space. Two gargoylike heads stick out at the base of the pipes, as if guarding the sacred activity from a sixteenth-century viewpoint.

Patrick Crabb exhibited during September at Running Ridge Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Susan Zwinger is an artist and a writer for Artlines, Artspace, Artweek, Craft Range, and the Santa Fe Reporter.



Ban Kajitani

Gary Wells

Ban Kajitani's ceramic works provoke reflection on landscape not only through their titles and their forms, but through the sense they convey of contradiction and contrast, the essential characteristics of landscape art. Kajitani realizes that nature is meaningful through both its forms and images, its processes and forces, and makes this contrast felt in his work. Nature is both static and dynamic, it is both the rock and the force that shapes the rock.

The most intriguing of the works shown at the Columbus Museum of Art are vertical wall pieces, strips of clay mounted on wood that undulate forward and back like the rolling terrain of the Midwest. Projecting from these narrow strips are thin slabs of clay, like sheets of slate exposed by the weather. Titles such as *Erosion*, *Ohioscape*, and *Riverscape* tantalize, even mislead us, into searching for a referential side to the works. But these are not vignettes from some geological survey, nor are they pedantic representations. Certain features suggest the interpretation much more than the representation of nature. For example, deep within the piece called *Riverscape No. 3*, there is a stream of blue glass, a tiny frozen river, whose flowing quality is sharply contradicted by the crackled hardness of its surface. The works in general are colored with a delicacy that is not entirely unnatural, yet formally pleasing. Some pieces have jarring, curiously architectural protrusions. The contradictions present in Kajitani's work both represent his subjects and interpret their state of being. That little fragment of a river is a clever contradiction. There is something to be said here about the contrariness of nature, its powers of transformation, and its relativity of scale, like the proverbial ocean in a drop of water. Contradictory, too, are the larger wall slabs called *Unearthedscapes*. Are we looking at an archaeological site where the foundations of a building have been exposed, or is it a fragment of some small object dug from the earth? Perhaps the titles again mislead us into searching for a subject. Scale, too, tends to bind us to representation. But the ambiguity of scale in Kajitani's works creates levels of meaning beyond mere representation. The suggestive titles set the tone of the works but do not entirely explain them. These larger works have a landscape feeling, but are dominated by the artificial, by the constructed form. They are tectonic pieces; they suggest the passage of time as a natural process, but they are also images of the created rather than the found.

While the wall pieces suggest the landscape through form, texture, and color, Kajitani's vessels do not seem at first to follow this direction. They are delicate rather than geological, and their slightly asymmetrical roundness is too sensuous to attribute them to the same origin as the wall pieces. But what are we to make of the ribbons of pale color—pinks, blues, tans, lavenders—that swirl around the waists of these vessels? There is a fluidity to these bands that belies the dryness of the surface itself, a contradictory river of sand not unlike that frozen stream of water/glass in the *Riverscape*. And do those tiny geometric markings that float across the white ground of the vessels relate to the tiny architectural objects of the *Ohioscapes*? The title given to two of the vessels, *Landmark in Sphere*, is again suggestive but not conclusive.

The imagery of landscape is, after all, an imagery that reflects the artist's inner vision and not just the outward appearance of nature. Contradiction in nature is, well, natural, but contradiction in human affairs is ambiguous. Kajitani's largest piece, *Message Five*, might be seen as an attempt at some reconciliation of that essential contradiction between nature and human nature. The towering

columns are smooth on one side and rugged on the other. Deeply cut symbols of arcs, spirals, and other geometric shapes cover the smooth surfaces and the bases of the towers. But perhaps this is the wrong place for monumentality. Scale here is not ambiguous, merely imposing. Even the small work called *Henge* seems to work better as a monument, at a fraction of the size of *Message Five*. Perhaps the message could better be said modestly than heroically. The intriguing feature of Kajitani's work is that it is open-ended. Each piece is a fragment, a part of a larger whole. They are synecdoches that suggest a continuity of meaning beyond their immediate presence. Such is the case with most landscape art. The frame of the landscape painting bounds only the immediate view, not the larger concept. Yet each of Kajitani's works is self-sufficient; each is "finished" and "complete" unto itself. That contradiction is not only a parallel to nature's contradictions, it is the crux of the Romantic problem in art—the reconciliation of the fragment with the whole. The finished piece is static, it is the substance formed from the process. Yet the fragment is dynamic, it suggests the process of both creation and destruction. Self-sufficiency need not mean hermeticism, as Kajitani's art so admirably demonstrates.

Ban Kajitani, head of ceramics at the Columbus College of Art and Design, Ohio, was featured last December at the Collectors Gallery, Columbus Museum of Art.

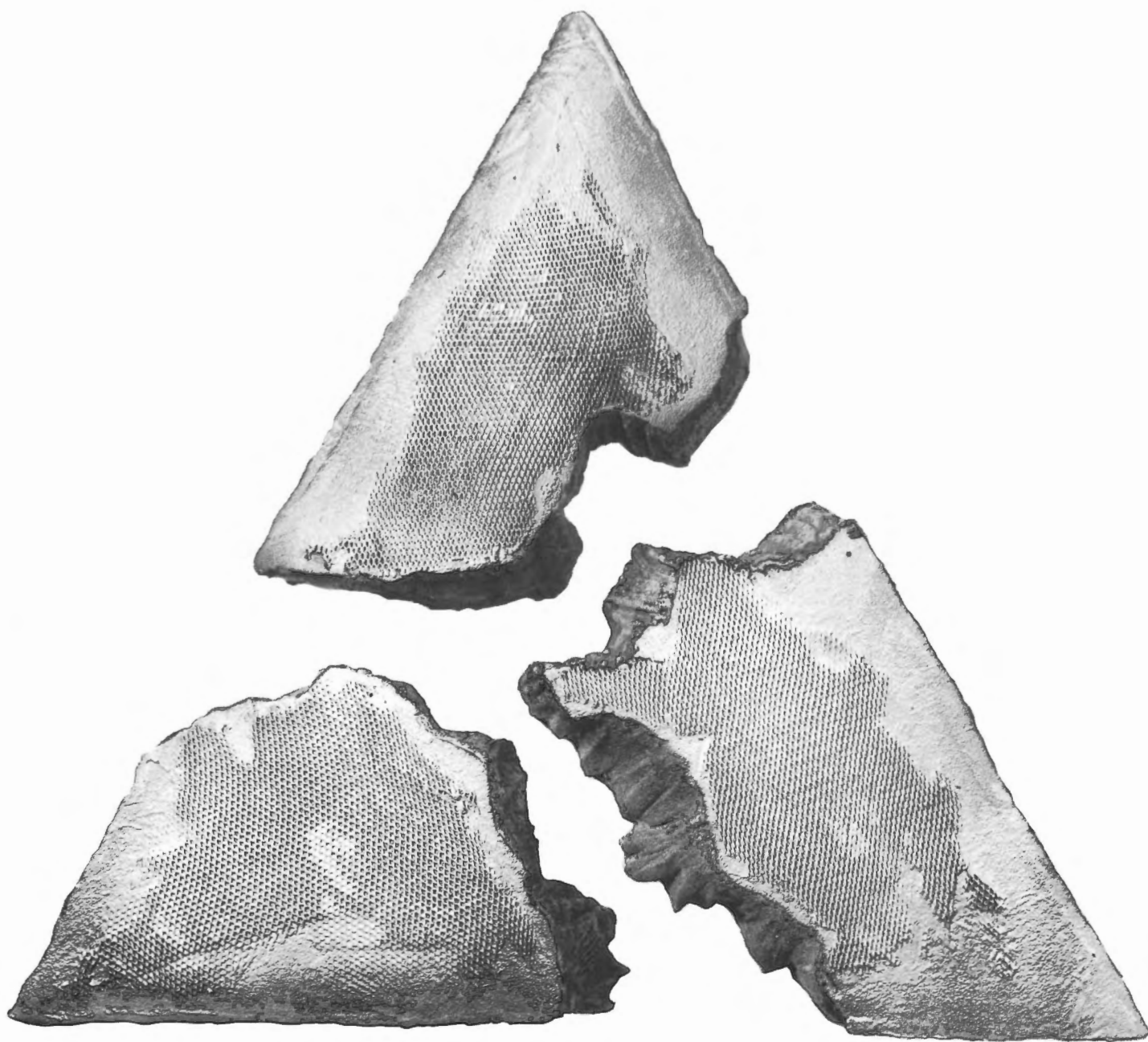
Gary Wells teaches art history at Ohio State University, Columbus.

Unearthedscape #1 (1984), 22" x 24"
(55 x 60 cm).



Variation on a Triangle (1984), 48" x 54" x 6"
(120 x 135 x 15 cm), clay, casting slip, glaze.

Variation on a Line (1984), 53" x 5" x
5½" (133 x 13 x 14 cm), clay, glaze,
autopaint.



James Leacock

Suzanne Ramljak

For the past several years, James Leacock has been exploring the sculptural potential of liquid clay. During the course of inquiry, he has experimented with clay renditions of paper, books, paintings, and reliefs. His exploration now finds him on luxurious, multilayered terrain: layer upon layer of casting slip is poured or sprayed, then glazed and painted, creating forms replete with the dense textural undertones and active typology one finds in mineral pockets, in river beds, and on mountain ridges.

Such references to natural typology are not gratuitous. Leacock dwells on the parallels between the sculptor's act and the dynamics of nature: "When working with clay, we use processes that clearly imitate the physical nature of our world. In the mining, sorting, mixing, forming, and firing of the materials, we reenact nature's systems." What particularly interests Leacock is the natural interplay between earth and water, which he tries to capture with the fluid qualities of slip.

For his *Landscape Series*, Leacock reenacted the dynamics of fossilization and sedimentation. Carved foam rubber saturated with clay slip leaves a hollow, fossilized remain when the rubber burns away in the firing. The residual effects of the original carving, done with an electric knife, combine with the finely sprayed surface to preserve both the violence and the delicacy inherent in the process. For the *Patterns, Choice and Chance Series*, layers of clay slip were poured into triangular reservoirs and the surface was built with sprayed paint and glaze. The natural drying process resulted in a cracked dissolution of form, which has the character of a dried riverbed when reassembled. Though relatively flat, these sculptures provide the illusion of depth through the layering of transparent and opaque surfaces.

As the title of the series suggests, chance was welcomed at various stages of production, especially in the kiln, where the atmospheric reaction on the glaze aroused unforeseen coloring. The engaging tensions in Leacock's work arise from this playful dialectic between intent and accident. The intercourse of choice and chance ultimately produces patterns, both desired and unexpected, while the layers build like associations into evocative scenarios.

More intent on suggesting the process of growth and transformation than on making a highly finished product, Leacock is involved with how the creative process becomes crystallized in the geography of clay. On a larger, ecological scale, he is interested in what he calls "the layering of history in landscape." The layers in his own work have correspondence with both his personal history and cultural history. In Greece, where his ceramic studies began, he would uncover shards while digging clay for his own pots. This initial encounter with ceramics was also an encounter with the history buried in the earth's crust, housing remains of previous creative cycles. His work's layered structure connotes such buried history, as the linear surface scrapings have agricultural associations and the honeycomb structures connote human communities. Read in this way, as maps of the earth's surface, his sculptures speak of the cyclic imposition of cultural patterns and their burial in time. As the eye travels this rich, layered terrain, the mind is encouraged to pursue such an archaeology of association.

James Leacock's work was seen at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor.

Suzanne Ramljak is an art historian and a free-lance critic residing in Ann Arbor.



(Two views) Bisimbi Boogy (1984), 32" x 48"
x 5" (80 x 120 x 13 cm), lowfire ceramic,
glaze, acrylic, mirrors.



Andy Nasisse

Janet Koplos

One could say that Andy Nasisse's work displays the modern dilemma of sophistication longing for naïveté. His collecting of folk art, his admiration of utilitarian pottery, and his use of clay as a primitive material are all tributes to the directness and honesty of the untrained artist. But his own work is anything but simple. His reliefs of clay, styrofoam, mirror fragments, and other materials, which traveled last year to three Georgia galleries and were shown in conjunction with his folk art collection, are multileveled and complex. The close visual and emotional relationship of his work to folk art is obvious, but its intellectual grounding is also clear. Raw surfaces, unrefined application, and religious subject matter are borrowed from folk art, especially that of his adopted Southeast. Nasisse seems like a Georgia Andy Warhol—perhaps plagiaristic, maybe childlike, sometimes too obvious. But close study of his work shows it to be a layering of allusions to primal drives and fears, resulting in poignant, penetrating observations.

His subjects are sex, religion, and death. Nudes and skulls are constant motifs. The religious tone that permeates his work is not entirely that of the dominant Christian faith, but is drawn from religious universals that tie Christianity to the religion of so-called "primitive" peoples, such as the Olmecs.

Nasisse's reliefs are distillations of that modern dilemma, "too much information," as the rock group Police characterizes it. All the knowledge of history and the present is at our disposal, yet we are not able to see it whole or make sense of it. Our lives are contradictory and illogical blends of superstition and cynicism, enjoyment and cruelty, fear and anger. Recognition of these imbalances in life could result in profound pessimism, but in Nasisse's work they result in a wry description of what it is to be an intelligent human in the shadow of the nuclear cloud. Nasisse operates under the modern license to use whatever is available for his art, and the consequent juxtapositions in his work document the imbalances of modern life. A basic example is the astonishing antithesis of his materials: clay and styrofoam, eternal earth versus the lightweight insubstantiality of modern invention. Likewise, his imagery borrows freely from folk art, ancient religious iconography, and the comic strip.

One group of works might be characterized as framed pictures. In these clay painting/reliefs, the "frames" are decorative, unexpected, and obsessive (pennies in one and mirror shards in another) while the "pictures" are multiple, overlapping images without unity of focus or spatial organization, similar to pictographs, cave paintings, and many contemporary primitives. In the best of these pieces, such as *Jam Session* and *Hex*, one or two images are clear and the rest seem a mishmash. But look a little closer. The swath of color across Nasisse's self-portrait is suddenly and obviously an upside-down nude. Her hair transforms into a death's head. A figure with a small, three-dimensional head (he looks like a combination of Jimmy Carter, Augustus of Prima Porta, and Zero from the Beetle Bailey comic strip) is enveloped in a shadow that suddenly reveals itself as an evil panther mask. Other faces fit into each other like M. C. Escher puzzles. Images emerge and alter before our eyes with the fluidity of dreams.

Nasisse uses the same approach in drawings on paper. In *Last Judgment*, for instance, he combines shadowplay of hands forming monsters, Popeye, goats, skeletons, a horned devil, a coupling couple, and his own face looking young, sleepy, and maybe bored, into an overall result of high-strung tension. The compaction of these images focuses on basic elements—fear, carnality, wonder, creation, animal nature, death. Perhaps it is easier for an art-

educated audience to accept the validity of such a confluence of references in drawings, a traditional art technique, but the clay reliefs are in fact richer.

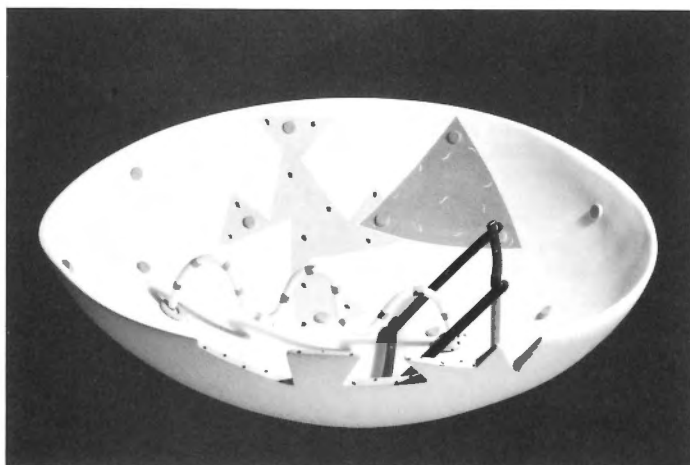
This mix of images reveals the artist's specific intelligence and vision, thoughtfully and deliberately "created." But what Nasisse seeks is the folk art "drive"—the vision that we usually take as either humorously charming or slightly looney. In our society, we presume that the mystic transformations of Christianity are reserved for the simple and uneducated. Yet the fascination of many artists, including Nasisse, with folk and tribal art seems to be a widespread envy of that simple faith and passion, that sure center of being.

Nasisse's main failure is that he remains self-aware and can never quite let go of propriety and equilibrium. He keeps his cool, even when it seems clear that he doesn't mean to. But he offsets this with his pseudo-primitivism—raw, junky, glitzy, almost punk—and with the urgency of his searching focus. It's like probing a nerve, looking for the pain, or pleasure, seeking that shooting, blinding moment of obliviousness to all but the sensation or emotion.

In his choices, and the repeated hard working of his themes, Nasisse's artwork reveals intellect looking for its base physicality, consciousness looking for instinct, analysis looking for impulse. He's trying for—and showing glimpses of—the holistic fusion of past and present, pagan and Christian, Western and third world. Nasisse seems to say that despite all the differences, after all, we are the same human race. Cutting ourselves into fragments and types makes us alone; seeing history in our present creates a comfortable, securing connection. Nasisse's borrowing of images is an observation of continuity and relationships, a cultural catalogue.

Drawings and sculptures by Andy Nasisse, as well as folk art objects from his own collection, were exhibited last year in Georgia at the Lamar Dodd Art Center, LaGrange; Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta; and Madison Morgan Culture Center, Madison. An illustrated catalogue is available.

Joan Rosenberg



Raylene Decatur

Joan Rosenberg's recent *Jazz* series explores many of the dominant issues confronting ceramic artists. She is questioning the role of the vessel, exploring the vitality of color, and approaching personal expression through a symbolic vocabulary. Her pieces of the late seventies were structures of geometric elements, devoid of ornament or color. She was concerned then with pristine surfaces, which were uncluttered and contributed only to the unity of her forms. "I work in porcelain because of its smoothness, whiteness, and lack of spots," she stated in *American Porcelain*. The porcelain is still smooth, white, and spotless, but her work is less dependent on the qualities of her medium for its message.

The *Jazz* pieces are a combination of the mundane and the stimulating, the intellectual and the populist. Here Rosenberg, like Nancy Selvin and Donna Polseno, contemplates that muse and nemesis of the ceramist, the vessel. She chooses apparently utilitarian bowls, which range from tea-bowl to salad-bowl size, but the space created within their walls is her focal point. This space is transformed into a landscape for her glossary of geometric forms—an alphabet composed of triangles, spirals, and complex polygons. The arrangement of these elements in the vessel creates small compositions or vignettes, and the same syllabus of forms is repeated over and over in each vessel. The repetition of these ciphers becomes iconographic, reminiscent of ancient runes and forgotten languages whose coded symbols are no longer understood.

Before sinking too deeply into the cerebral realm of symbolic archaeology, however, Rosenberg negates this interpretation by using a very contemporary palette of sherbet colors: canary yellow, baby pink, and polyester purple leap off the white porcelain ground, lending them a gaiety reminiscent of Alexander Calder's sculpture. Despite their domestic scale, these objects do encourage the viewer to move around and view the action from a variety of orientations. The composition alters; forms playfully interact with decorated surfaces and silhouettes cut into the bowls' walls. The most successful aspects of this work are illustrated in *Half Moon Bay*. There are some problems to be resolved, however. The unvarying use of the bowl form makes this work repetitious. And although their scale is not a problem in itself, these pieces would be much more commanding if they better utilized the surrounding space, if they reached out both laterally and vertically beyond their present, shallow space.

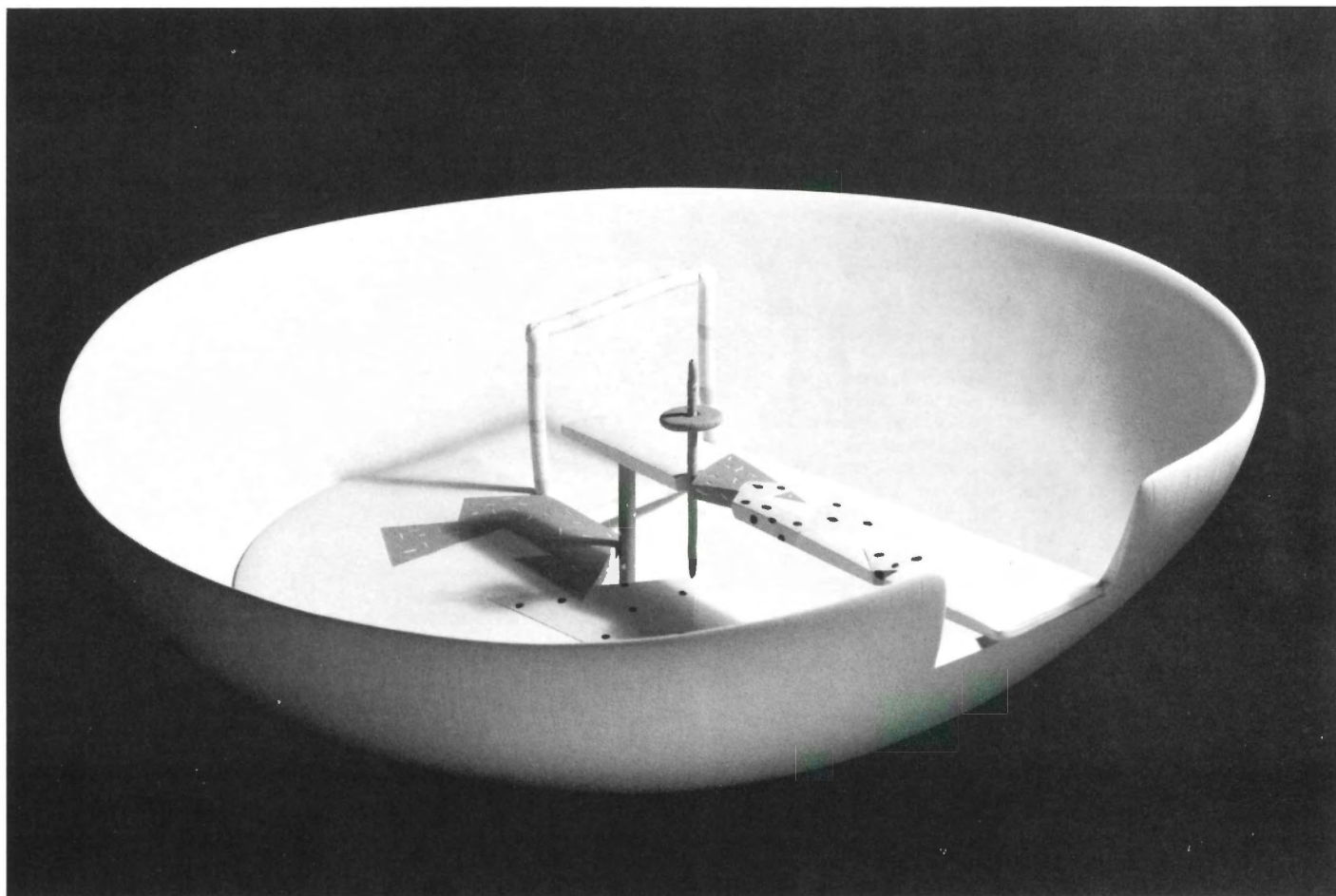
Joan Rosenberg's work was seen at the Clay Studio Gallery, Philadelphia.

Raylene Decatur curated the "Clay for Walls" exhibit while at the Renwick Gallery, Washington, and is currently guest curator at the Campbell Museum in Campden, New Jersey.

Raylene Decatur curated the "Clay for Walls" exhibit while at the Renwick Gallery, Washington, and is currently exhibit coordinator for Lynch Museum Services, a division of Lynch Industries, Inc., Pennsauken, New Jersey.

Painted Rhythm (1984) 19" (48 cm)
diameter.

Dockside Thru the Window (1984), 19"
(48 cm) diameter.



Robert Shay

Gary Wells

Robert Shay's recent work is both painterly and romantic. Shay has the temperament, the touch, even the respect for surfaces and textures and illusions that we find in a painter. His ceramic pieces are three-dimensional surfaces to be worked over, layer upon layer, in a process akin to painting in oils on canvas. Through this painterliness, Shay brings an undisguised romanticism to his work: his pieces are personal evocations of nature, hinted at in their geological imagery and color. They indulge the artist's love of process and interaction with the medium. They are works of deliberation that have the air of spontaneity. But with this paradox we return to romanticism, for the romantic artist conceals intellect behind temperament, hides labor beneath seemingly effortless facility.

The painter's temperament has always been present in Shay's personality. His early series of *trompe-l'oeil* ceramic high-heeled shoes, with their Magritte-like transformations of dagger heels or fishing-lure adornments, seemed more appropriate to a pictorial mode than a sculptural one. A later series of cowboy boots countered the intellectualism of the shoes, but at the risk of becoming self-conscious Pop. It was only when Shay violated the *trompe-l'oeil* illusionism of the shoes and boots for a different kind of illusion that his images started to become both distinctly personal and more universal in tone. Rejecting pictorialism for a looser and richer surface, he substituted an illusion of time—as if the objects were things found in the earth rather than in the shopping mall. The form that has dominated Shay's work for the past two years has been a simple, inverted, truncated cone, a vessel in its most basic configuration. He calls it a "spiritual shape," a form that is itself meaningful without being referential, a form that distills much of what ceramics has been about for so many centuries. The elimination of referential imagery gave Shay the freedom to explore avenues that had fascinated him: the geology of the Southwest United States, Navajo pottery and blanket designs, and the relationship of chance and artifice. His vessels have an archaeological feeling, like something found in an excavation. The surfaces carry both the painterly mark and the mark of natural forces and processes. There is a dryness to the sandblasted surfaces, a parched cracking of glaze, and a sunburned quality to the colors that expresses as well as any landscape painting the unique nature of the desert Southwest. There are spiral motifs and a slightly asymmetrical geometry that suggest the Navajo designs he is interested in. All this—time and process, primitiveness, chance, the painter's touch—reflects a sense of the world in romantic terms.

The paradoxical nature of these vessels is an extension of the illusionism Shay worked with earlier. The pieces look massive and weighty, yet they are hollow, light, fragile. They have a great formal simplicity, yet they are rich in surface detail. They are fired with unpredictable materials, but finished with highly controlled china paint details. They are civilized, but evoke a sense of the primitive. Exploiting these dualities, they remain strangely unified.

Shay's most recent work both reinforces these interests and moves beyond them. The wall pieces are the direct descendants of Shay's vessels, now transformed and given an autonomy through their shape and their orientation. They are squat and vessellike, but are perched like paintings on the wall, as if both affirming and denying their nature and their origins in the artist's evolution. On the other hand, the solid cones, while retaining the outward form of the earlier double-walled vessels, are more monumental. One is immediately struck by their blasted, ruined aspect. The pieces are

massive and heavy. They lack the paradox of weight of the earlier vessels and the wall pieces, but the paradox of scale seems to embody a hint of the old contradictions, with the blending of a macroscopic view in a microscopic form. While the vessels and wall pieces, however worn or haphazard their surfaces may be, still show a delicacy and refinement, these recent romantic ruins are tough, insistent, and almost uncontrolled, although they do not fall into expressionist angst. Shay's art is a romantic art, but it is a romanticism of temperament rather than catharsis.

Robert Shay's ceramics were reviewed at Ree Schonlau Gallery, Omaha, and exhibited more recently at Toni Birkhead Gallery, Cincinnati.

Irrelevant Expectations (1984), 18" x 24" x
3" (45 x 60 x 8 cm), *whiteware*. Photo: Doug
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Vase, 1974, 30" X 13", stoneware

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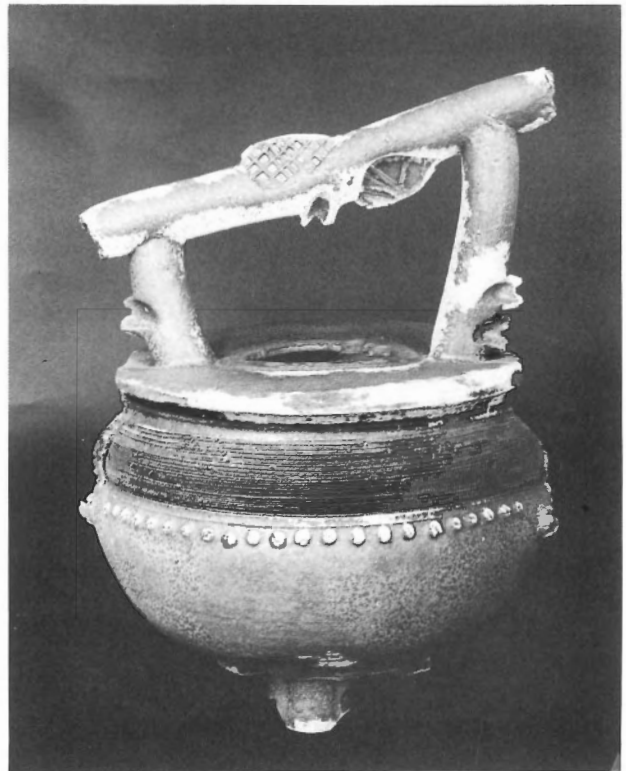
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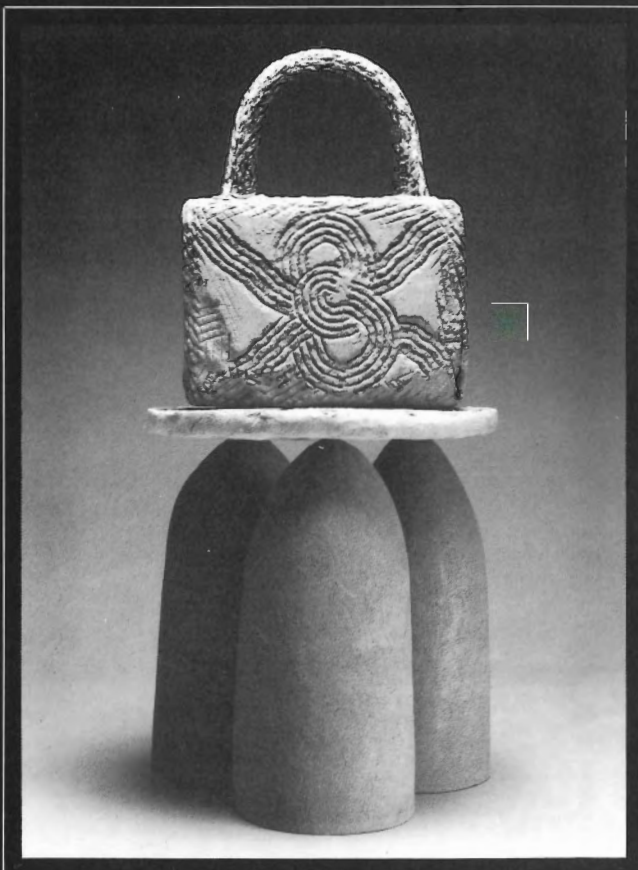
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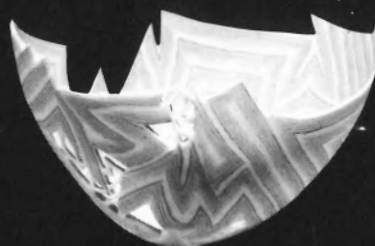


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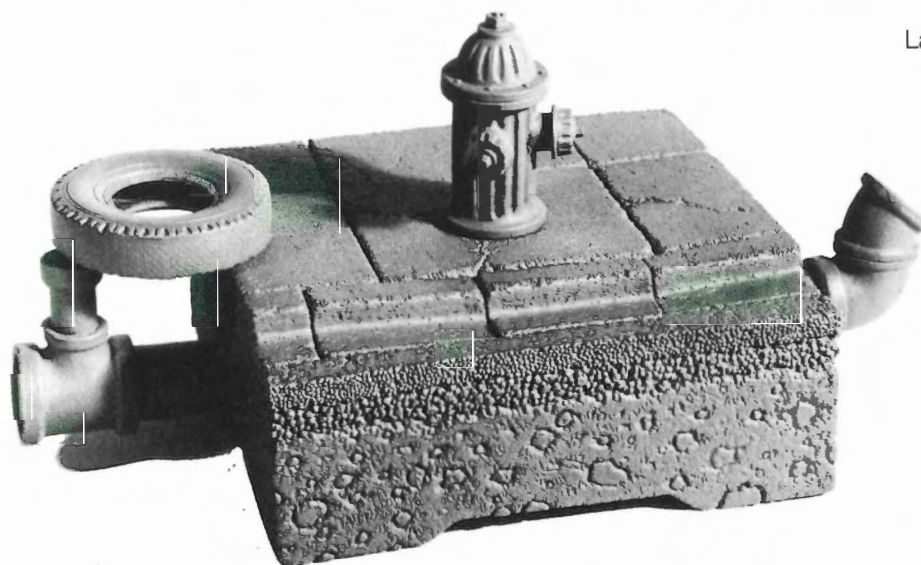


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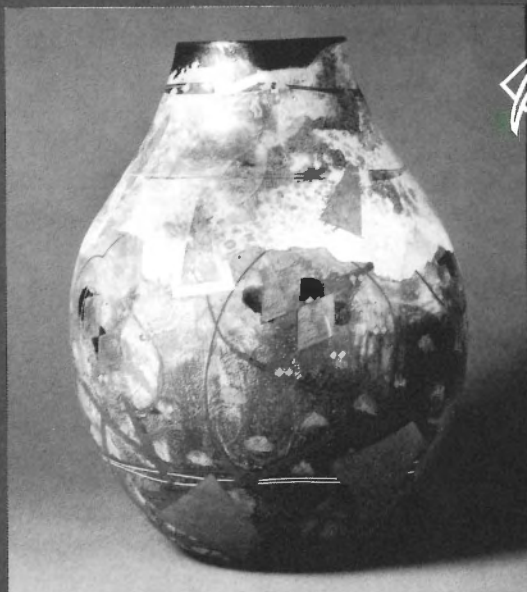
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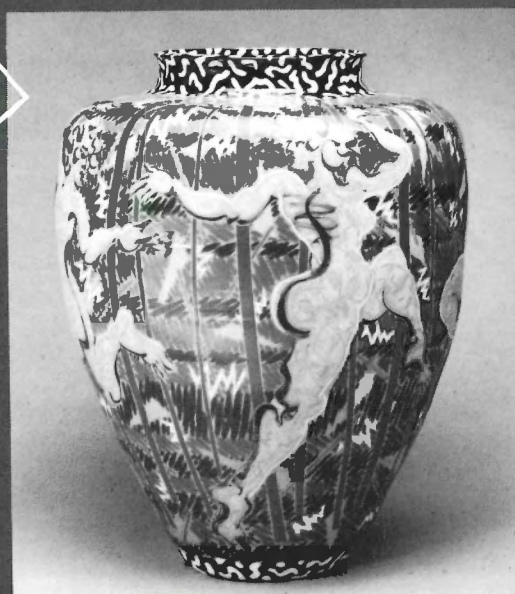
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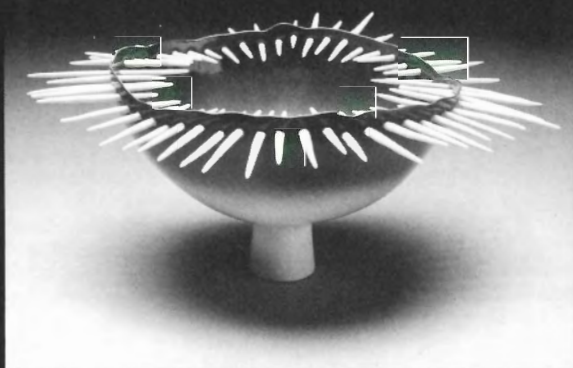
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1/3 Toby Buonagurio by Thomas Piché/Val Cushing by Sarah Bodine and Edward Lebow/What You Didn't See at the Whitney by Joanne Burstein/A Way of Seeing by Mark Anderson/Raymon Elosua by Susan Wechsler/Clay Roots & Routes by Dale Ruff/Critical Dimensions: How Shall We Judge by Louise Klemperer/The Searching Flame: Charles Fergus Binns by Susan R. Strong. Exhibition reviews: Peter Vouklos, Elsa Rady, Joseph Mannino, Patrick Horsley, Gifford Myers, Judy Moonelis.

1/4 Philip Cornelius: The Container Continuum by Joanne Burstein/A Warning to Readers by Edward Lebow/Adrian Saxe: an Interview by Garth Clark/Harvey Goldman by Susan Montgomery/Paul Soldner by Michael G. Rubin/The Early Literature of Ceramics by Ruth Irwin Weidner. Exhibition reviews: Tony Hepburn, Bruria, Carl Culbreth, Rina Peleg, Kris Cox, Michael and Magdalena Frimkess, Andrea Gill, Walt Gordinier, Thomas Hoadley.

2/1 Nest of Bones: Deborah Horrell by Louise Klemperer/In Search of a Transparent Art: John Mason by Jeff Kelley/A Way of Seeing: Part Two by Mark Anderson/Reconstruction with Shards by Robert C. Morgan/The Bauer Pottery by Joanne Burstein. Exhibition reviews: Jane Ford Aebersold, Elaine Carhartt, Ann Gardner, Nicholas Homoky, Coille McLaughlin Hooven, Gail Kendall, Jens Morrison, Arthur Nelson, Don Pilcher, Donna Polseno, Dan Snyder, Kenneth Vavrek.

2/2 Marylyn Dintenfass by April Kingsley/Celestial Bodies: Christina Bertoni by Susan Wechsler/The Early Literature of China Decorating by Ruth Irwin Weidner/Lidya Buzio: In Perspective by Edward Lebow/Chris Unterseher by Jeff Kelley. Exhibition reviews: Curtis and Suzan Benzle, Thom Bohnert, Paul Chaleff, Dennis Gallagher, Stan Hain, Paulina Van Bavel Kearney, Dora de Larios, Pat McCormick, Mineo Mizuno, Mayer Shacter, Kurt Weiser.

2/3 Mythical Habitats: J.R. Cobb by Robert C. Morgan/Arnold Zimmerman by Ellen Priest/The Travels of John Roloff by Joanne Burstein/Tablets of Earth by Matthew Kangas/Kenneth Ferguson by Michael G. Rubin. Exhibition reviews: Ralph Bacerra, Walter Darby Bannard, Robert Brady, Tony Costanzo, Dorothy Hafner, Lyn Haxton, Jun Kaneko, Geoffrey Pagen, Adrian Saxe, John Stephenson.

2/4 Linda Kramer by Janet Koplos/Robert McGowan by John A. Whisler/The Ceramic Sculpture of Ron Fondaw: The Medium is the Message by Paula Harper/From the Ground of Daily Experience by Heather Dawkins/Texas Clay by Janet Kutner/The Omaha Brickworks by Lorne Falk. Exhibition reviews: Takako Araki, Ann Christenson, John Donoghue, Gloria Graham, Keiji Ito, Margaret Keelan, Mike Moran, Ron Nagle, Toshiko Takaazu.

3/1 Mark Burns: Saints and Sinners by Sid Sachs/Stephen DeStaebler by Joanne Burstein/Viola Frey by Jeff Kelley/The Figure Emerges: American Clay Sculpture, 1925-1950 by Barbara Perry/Patrick Siler by Arthur Okazaki/Views on the Figure by Susan Wechsler. Exhibition reviews: Mary Jo Bole, Rick Dillingham, Jod Lourie, Graham Marks, Mel Rubin.

3/2 Laura Anderson by Diana Rico/A Passionate Vision: The Daniel Jacobs Collection by Michael McTwigan/Conversation Pieces: The Cups of Irvin Tepper by Paul Schimmel/William De Morgan by Jon Catleugh/Ted Randall by Susan Wechsler. Exhibition reviews: Bill Abright, Scott Chamberlin, Jane Gustin, Jutta Savage, Melissa Zink.

3/3 Tall Tales: Ken Little's Portraits of the West by Ed Forde/Eva Zeisel: Humanistic Design for Mass Production by Sarah Bodine/Toward the Modern Style: Late Rookwood: 1915-1950 by Ruth Irwin Weidner/Jun Kaneko by Lorne Falk/Henry Varnum Poor by Edward Lebow. Exhibition reviews: Mary Frank, Ernest Hilsenberg, Curtis Hoard, Giuseppe Gattuso Lo Monte, Phillip Maberry, Peter VandenBerge, Stan Welsh.

3/4 In Search of Form: Hans Coper and Lucie Rie by Michael Dunas and Sarah Bodine/A Handful of Beauty A Hint of Beast by Michael McTwigan/Vessel as Center by Philip Rawson/Wayne Higby by Louise Klemperer/The Vessel is Like a Pot by Wayne Higby/Holding the Center: Warren MacKenzie and the Core of Vesselmaking by Dale K. Haworth and Karen F. Beall/Robert Turner by Johanna Burstein Hays/Elsa Rady: Porcelain Vessels by Mac McCloud. Exhibition reviews: Rudy Autio, Kirk Mangus, Betty Woodman.

4/1 Jack Earl by Lee Nordness/The Flesh Pots of Rudy Autio by Edward Lebow/Arthur González: Of Melodramas, Movie Stars, and Modern Times by William Zimmer/George E. Ohr by Garth Clark/Potters and Prints by Jeff Kelley/Marilyn Lysohir by Arthur Okazaki. Exhibition reviews: Michael Gustavson, Anne Perrigo, Arlene Shechet, Debra Sherwood.

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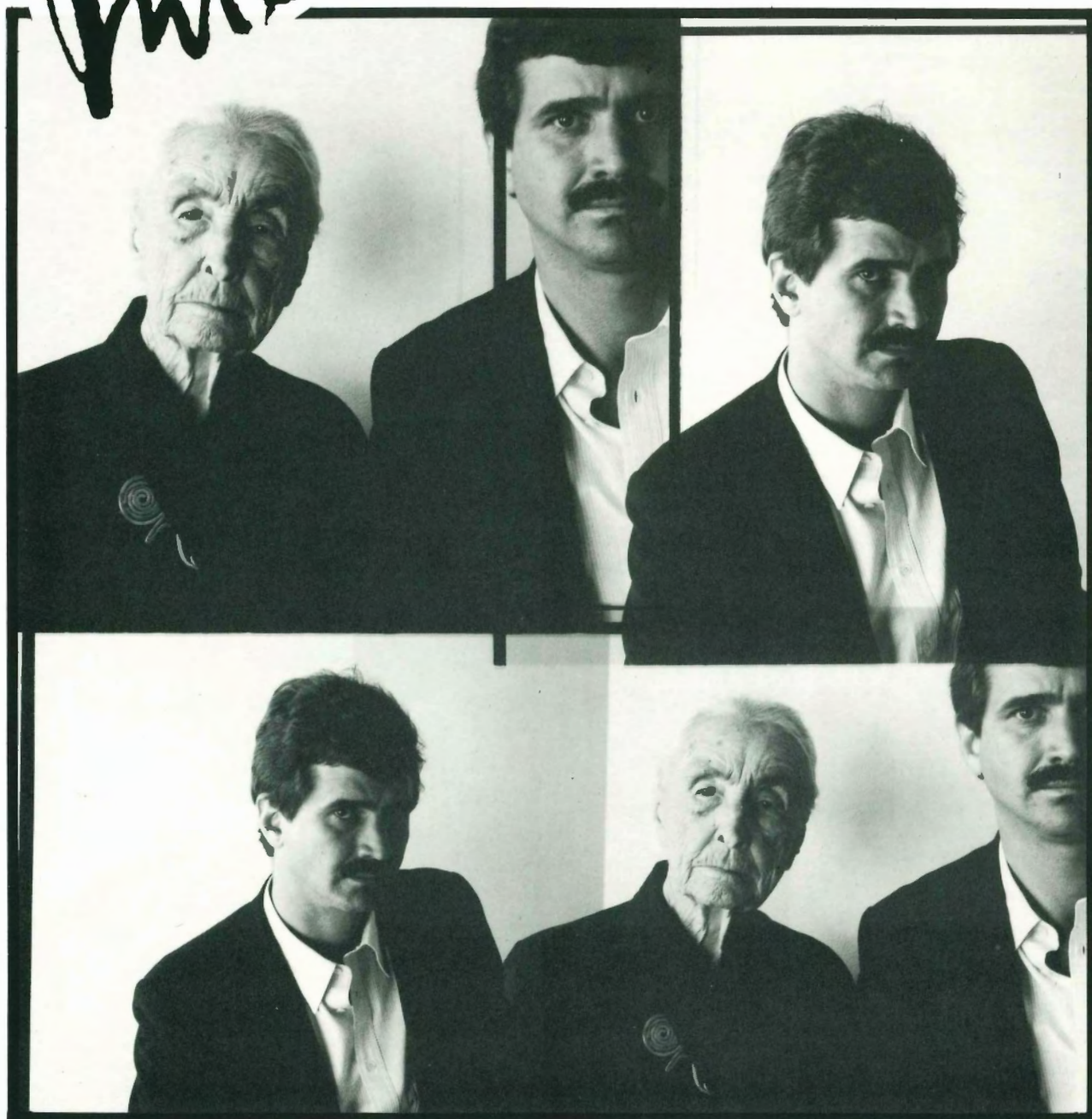
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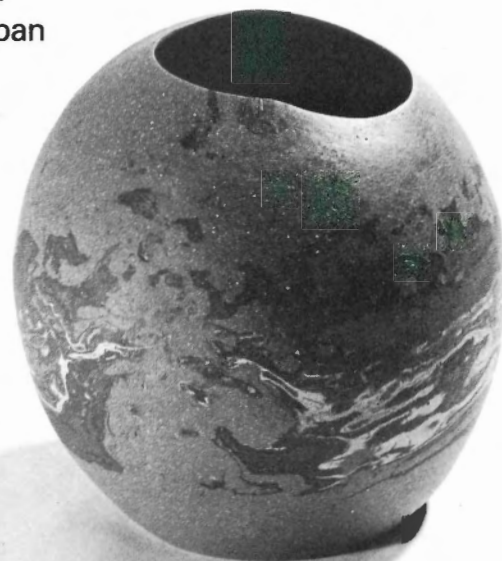
Figurine Momentum 1 (1985), 15½" high, ceramic luster, glaze.

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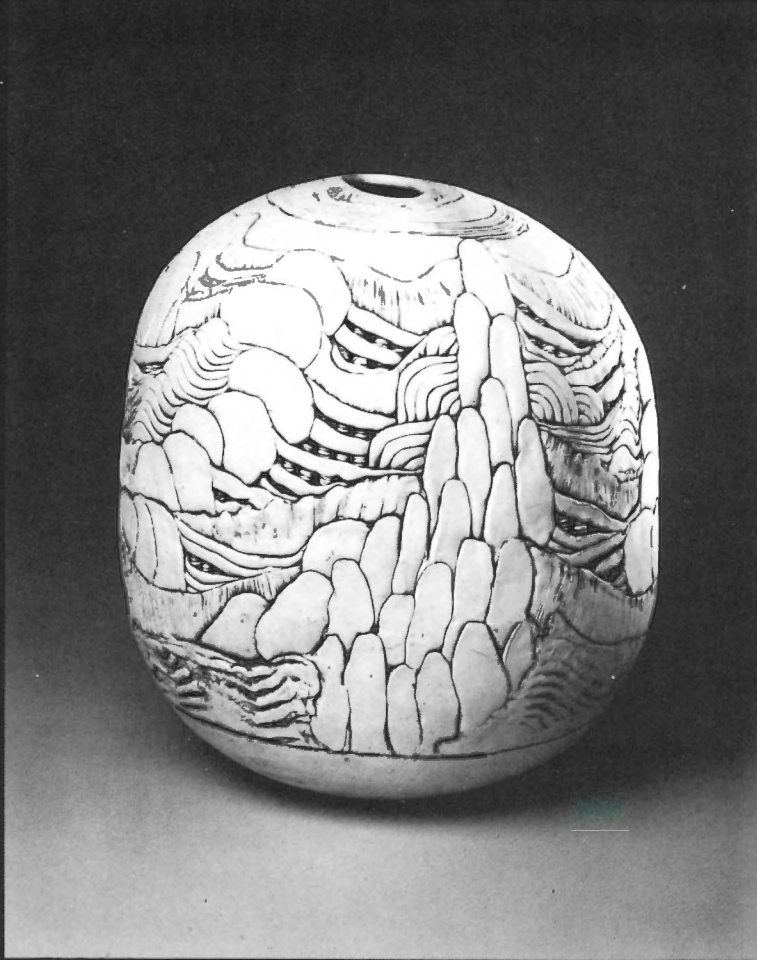
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